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Unmasking Ecological Warfare – Shell-BP, Nigeria, and the Movement for the Survival of the
Ogoni People

by

Thomas Paterson

Under the Direction of Harcourt Fuller, PhD

A Thesis submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2023

ABSTRACT

The state-killings of the Ogoni Nine on 10 November 1995 exposed environmental damage and social degradation beyond comprehension to the globe. Since the discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri in 1957, the Niger Delta has been subject to mass oil extraction led predominately by Shell-BP. This thesis explores the long history of mineral and oil cultivation and its influence on the formation of the Nigerian state. This thesis argues that oil's predominance in Nigeria's economy was rooted in British neo-colonialism. International and domestic Shell-BP sectors informed political decisions in Nigeria's post-colonial world that eventually led to the death of nine Ogoni leaders in 1995. Mass mobilization under Ken Saro-Wiwa turned a regional, ethnic conflict into an international spectacle through his tireless work to uncover this connection. Saro-Wiwa, and MOSOP's lasting and impactful legacy, was exposing rampant corruption and intentional personal and environmental destruction.

INDEX WORDS: Niger Delta, Saro-Wiwa, MOSOP, Shell-BP, Nigeria, Neo-colonialism, Colonialism, State-violence, Nigerian Development, Environmental activism, indigenous movements.

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2023

Unmasking Ecological Warfare – Shell-BP, Nigeria, and the Movement for the Survival of the
Ogoni People

by

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Committee Chair: Harcourt Fuller

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Georgia State University

May 2023

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late grandfather, David Charles Twining. Dr. Twining was a student of history for most of his life. While his own interests mostly pertained to early U.S. History, he greatly influenced both my appreciation of the discipline and for education. I want to extend a thank you to my family and friends for supporting me through this project. To my mother for her support through my entire academic and personal life. Her own experiences with her Master of Arts in Religious Studies provided me comfort when I felt I was slacking on my work. She reminded me even the largest of tasks can be broken down and managed, which helped me greatly. I would lastly like to thank my father for the numerous nights he spent reading over drafts of this project. His criticism was tremendously helpful in crafting this thesis and for that I am grateful.

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I owe much gratitude to Dr. Harcourt Fuller, my advisor, for not only introducing me to the subject of this project, but for his input and assistance in this endeavor. I've had the pleasure to work with Dr. Fuller in both undergrad and for this Master's program and I appreciated his guidance during this process. I'd also like to thank Dr. Larry Grubbs for his constructive feedback throughout this project.

In his *New Directions in Global Studies* seminar, Dr. Ian Fletcher introduced me to the field of environmental history. To that point, I was entirely unaware of the specialty or the methods and subjects that would constitute an environmental history. As I've learned, that answer is expansive and multi-disciplinary. Works like *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* and *Our History is Our Future* demonstrated to me the possibilities and power of the genre, and I cannot thank Ian enough for those recommendations and for his support.

Completion of this document would not have been possible without knowing about GSU's 4+1 Degree. The ability to take graduate level courses and effectively "test the waters" before committing to this degree was a great opportunity. To that, I am thankful for Dr. Denise Davidson for coming in to my HIST 3000 course in Spring 2018 to inform us of that opportunity. Dr. Davidson, additionally, greatly assisted in creating the skeleton of this project in her HIST 7050 Seminar.

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1 INTRODUCTION

This project aims to explain how the Nigerian government, backed by Shell-BP, was able to execute nine leading members of the Movement for the Survival for the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1993 based on largely fraudulent charges. I wish to tie the grander economic, political, and social transformations of 20th century Nigeria to the MOSOP to demonstrate how the group's activism unmasked years of intentional and long-term propaganda efforts that pinned human rights violations and lack of environmental protections on governmental malpractice rather than Shell. In his seminal work, *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, Kwame Nkrumah provides the term neocolonialism to describe the relationship between multi-national corporations (MNCs), African governments, and geological resources.¹ I plan to expand upon this framework by illustrating how the environmental desecration that occurred in the Niger Delta was largely made possible through neo-colonialism. The prospect of large profits that could lead the way to a self-sufficient state encouraged Nigerian leaders to allow oil corporations, primarily Shell-BP, the freedom to extract oil by any means. Years of profit-motivated oil processing practices have consequently destroyed the Niger Delta ecosystem and have made the region mostly uninhabitable. By relating their experiences to an international audience, the most significant success of the MOSOP, led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, was exposing Shell's ties to the Nigerian government. Exploring this connection and the hold MNCs continue to possess in developing countries illustrates the need for international governmental agencies to direct and implement policy changes for developing nations to appropriately address climate change.

¹ Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Panaf Books, 1965), 3.

The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, from 1990 to 1993, has been presented in a plethora of different works and perspectives. Four categories best describe current approaches to this historiography: politico-economics, nationalism, ethnicity and violence, and environmentalism. While the first three categories have received a wealth of analysis, environmental perspectives are surprisingly limited. Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas attempt to offer their voices to this viewpoint in *Where Vulture Feast*, which explores the historical developments of oil and its exploitative and destructive mark on Nigerian ethnic minorities. Their work, however, mostly discusses what happened rather than why it happened. More concerning than a lack of environmental perspective is the issue of chronology. Studies of Nigerian oil mostly concentrate on MOSOP, Shell and Nigeria from 1990-1995 at the peak of the conflict. Analyzing the climax, while certainly more exciting, ignores the longer historical developments that explain how Shell became a domineering force in the Nigerian economy and why oil could destroy much of the Niger Delta. By analyzing the period between the 19th and 20th century, it becomes clear that Shell's influence in Nigeria was, and remains, paramount to its economic interests. The legacy of MOSOP and Ken Saro-Wiwa relate to a more expansive narrative on environmental movements across the globe. Activists in the Global South like Ridhima Pandley in India, Kaluki Paul Mutuku in Kenya, Nina Gualinga in Ecuador, Leah Namugerwa in Uganda, and Wangari Maathai in Nigeria have protested their local governments over environmental destruction caused by destructive development.² This project will contribute ongoing conversations on indigenous environmental movements, and will ideally communicate to readers the necessity to examine the impacts of climate change and environmental struggles in developing nations.

² Chika Unigwe, "It's Not Just Greta Thunberg: Why Are We Ignoring the Developing World's Inspiring Activists?" *The Guardian*, October 2019, 1.

1.1 Historiography

One of my objectives with this project is to bridge the body of historiography on Ken Saro-Wiwa and the MOSOP with the literature on oil in Nigeria. Historiography on oil in Nigeria can best be divided into two periods: 1950s – 1996 and 1996 to the present. Works published within the first period tend to analyze and approach oil as a benefit to Nigerians and their goal of self-sufficiency.³ Of course, the tone of these works varies from optimism to skepticism based on global politics and the prices of oil. As Ann Genova and Toyin Falola note in their historiographical review, works published during the 1970s oil boom were more positive as Nigeria became the largest global supplier of crude oil. After the Yom Kippur War ended in the Middle East, the optimism of the period died down and more scholars critically analyzed the consequences of oil in shaping Nigerian politics, economics, and society.⁴ More books and articles written on the subject became skeptical, but historiographical perspectives of oil would greatly change in the early 21st centuries.

The death of the Ogoni Nine and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People greatly impacted the tone and perspective of scholars writing on oil in Nigeria. Now, these bodies of scholarship tailored their research and writing to discuss the conflicts between Shell-BP and the Ogoni people. Generally, these works fall under three categories: human rights criticisms, critical perspectives on Shell and Nigeria's military regime, and studies of the Nigerian judicial system and Shell's corporate and legal policies that allowed for the atrocities

³ See Samuel Aluko and M.O. Ijere, "The Economics of Mineral Oil," *Nigerian Journal of Economics and Social Studies* 7 (1965): 209–20; Mervin Jeffreys, "The Search for Oil in Nigeria: Promising Indications in the South," *African World* (September 1953), 26; Jean Herskovits, "Nigeria: Africa's New Power," *Foreign Affairs* 53 (1975), 314–33.

⁴ Ann Genova and Toyin Falola, "Oil in Nigeria: A Bibliographical Reconnaissance," *History in Africa* 30 (2003), 133–56.

committed in the 1990s to be a possibility.⁵ This transformation in perspective also saw dramatic change in the tone of scholarship, which generally saw oil as a nuisance or detrimental to Nigerian autonomy it was also the time when questions regarding environmental damage and desecration came to the forefront. There is further an emerging body of literature on Ken Saro-Wiwa, a leading activist of MOSOP and published author, and how his works shed light on the damage caused by the Shell corporation.

The historiography on the consequences of oil in Nigeria have not been thoroughly tied to the MOSOP cause. Those writing on the consequences of oil feature the likes of village communities to summarize the direct results of oil extraction and government corruption, wealth distribution, and public health. On the flip side, environmental scholars interested in the MOSOP movement find themselves regularly restricting their analysis to either the 90s or to Saro-Wiwa's role in the Nigerian Civil War. Only a few works have attempted to weave the longer history of oil fracking and Saro-Wiwa's activism. One example, from Okonta and Douglas, explains how Shell came to be a presence in the Niger Delta and why their involvement in the region has been a detriment to the communities living in this region. Their study is compelling, but primarily serves to spread awareness of the events and their gradual unfolding. Thus, their work is primarily an exposé on a company's actions, as opposed to an historical analysis of how Shell-BP retained control and power over the Niger Delta.

⁵ See Madalaine Drohan, "Shell in Nigeria" In *Making a Killing: How and Why Corporations Use Armed Force to Do Business* (Guilford: The Lyons Press, 2003), 126-154; Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil* (London: Verso, 2003), 3-24; Jędrzej Georg Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria: Conflict and Litigation between Oil Companies and Village Communities*, Vol. 1. Politics and Economics in Africa (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 2000), 1-7.

1.2 Sources

The sources I will use for this project include newsprint publications, speeches, literary sources, environmental surveys, and laws. The array of source materials will assist me in explaining the public relations tactics used by the Shell Corporation to perpetrate environmental misconduct, whether intentional or accidental since it first struck oil in the Niger Delta in 1957. Central to this project's line of inquiry will be the importance of understanding both the proliferation of positive information about the oil sector in Nigeria and the startling contrast between this and what oil executives state in court documents, as well as writings from various activists. Court cases, as Georg Jedrezj-Frynas has illustrated, can offer exceptional insight into how oil executives interact and negotiate with village communities in the Niger Delta. Therefore, this thesis will make use of several court cases to draw a comparison between how oil executives engaged with Niger Delta communities within the colonial and independence periods.

The completion of this research project will require a plethora of resources – some obtainable, others more difficult to access. For source materials, my analysis will primarily rely on exposé literature from former Shell executives, Ken Saro-Wiwa's writings, and significant laws like the Mineral Ordinances Act of 1914. Both Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day* and *Genocide in Nigeria* are well published and easily obtainable works to assist with understanding the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People. There is a collection of papers at Stanford University that I would ideally like to access. However, given the current pandemic and my risks as a Type I diabetic, I will likely be unable to access these records by the end of this year. There is also a newspaper from the first Nigerian President, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *West African Pilot*, that may have some relevance to my research on oil exploitation in the Niger Delta. Access to these records is limited, but through Dr. Azikiwe's autobiography, it is possible to gather his

insight on the Shell/D'Arcy (now Shell-BP) corporation and the company's engagement with the community. General Sani Abacha is a pivotal figure both as leader of Nigeria and as the main figure that perpetrated violence against the Ogoni and hung Saro-Wiwa for criminal charges. I will not have access to his personal records, as they are kept in the Nigerian Archives, so I will have to rely on his speeches and other public records to illustrate his relationship with Shell and the subsequent destruction caused by their mutual aspirations.

1.3 Method & Theory

Fernand Braudel's model of history, which includes long-term environmental and geographical factors; social, economic, and political transformations; and events, will provide useful perspective for this project. Without expanding the scope of this project beyond feasibility, my aim is to use Braudel's tiers of history to examine how geography and environment intersected with economic ambition to lead British petroleum explorers to begin fracking in the Niger Delta. I will do this by including mapping and other source materials to determine the reasoning behind altering oil exploration maps from the 1940s to 1960s. Visual source materials will be essential to demonstrating the significance of geography and topography to how Shell-BP managed to hide their extraction practices from the public for decades.

Central to this project's thesis is how Shell-BP utilized propaganda efforts to distance themselves from the government repression tactics used to quell protests oil fracking. In their study of the intellectual history of the term propaganda, Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell demonstrate how defining propaganda is complex and often varies on the basis of academic discipline.⁶ In an effort to create a cohesive, multi-disciplinary definition, the authors argue that propaganda can be defined as "the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions,

⁶ Jowett, Garth and Victoria O'Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 5th edition (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2011), 4-31.

manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist.”⁷ I will use this definition of propaganda to examine the ways in which Shell-BP executives sought to distance themselves from government intervention and repression. In public statements, how does the corporation frame its relationship with the Nigerian state? Historically, how have their communication strategies changed and what is being omitted in their statements? By asking these questions, my aim is to show how the corporation negotiated a neo-colonial framework that allowed corporate officials to use Nigerian institutions like the military to expediate oil extraction all without publicly acknowledging or drawing attention to their role in such actions.

In terms of interpreting source materials, the lines of questioning and analysis will vary based on the publication. Okonta and Douglas’s *Where Vultures Feast* demonstrates that Shell’s source materials should be compared with third-party sources. With regards to court cases, corporations employ elusive tactics to avoid answering controversial questions without lying. Thus, I will not necessarily look at what is being said, but rather what is *not* being said. The corporation today dismisses any involvement with the murder of Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni eight, yet in court hearings generals in charge of implementing violence against the Ogoni have stated their orders came directly from Shell. Comparative analysis and contrasting this with uninvolved third-party sources from NGOs and other activists will assist in painting the entire portrait of the conflict as opposed to only one side. Several questions will guide my source analysis. How does Saro-Wiwa communicate the Ogoni cause? In *Genocide in Nigeria*, what arguments is he making and why? How do promulgated laws protect collective corporate interest? More importantly, what laws were in place to communicate to the Nigerian public that

⁷ Jowett, Garth and Victoria O’Donnell, *Propaganda and Persuasion*, 7.

oil corporations like Shell were conducting their business in an environmentally safe manner?

Regarding contrasting environmental surveys from outside groups with the governments, how do their methods differ and what are the end results from varying methodologies? The method and theory for this project will balance perspectives between Shell executives and the Nigerian government with environmental activists and third-party observers.

1.4 The Road Ahead

Exposing decades of government corruption in the form mass profiteering, state sanctioned violence, and erosion of the Niger Delta environment will require us to follow multiple stories running in tandem to one another. As such, the thesis is structured chronologically into three distinct periods. Chapter I “Oil Exploration and the Making of the Nigerian State” examines the period from initial British conquest in Africa during the late 19th century to the end of World War II. I look specifically at how British interest in Nigeria was formed by a desire to exploit existing trading systems and reconfiguring them to distribute exotic goods to Europeans. This section also discusses the 1914 Mineral Rights Act – a pivotal piece of colonial-crafted legislation that effectively gave Shell-BP, then Royal Dutch Shell, it’s majority hold over the Niger Delta’s oil. Finally, the chapter closes by discussing Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and the movement for independence.

Chapter II “The Rise and Fall of Independence” begins on the onset of independence in October, 1960 and concludes with the rapid successions of multiple military coups all of whom can be characterized by a desire for control of oil resources. I explore how British policy during the Biafran War was fueled by protecting Shell-BP’s refineries and pipelines. This preservation ensured that British authorities – through the Shell-BP corporation – could protect their influence on the political and economic governance of the country. The era between 1967 and 1980 is the

period with which colonial dynamics took on a more neo-colonial form by obfuscating the role of Shell-BP in shaping government policy and inaction.

The final chapter of this thesis delves into the tumultuous period between 1990-1995 to examine how the Ogoni, Shell-BP, and newly independent Nigerian government pursued tactics that would protect personal and inter-group interests. For the Ogoni, the articulation of their struggle as a global attack on indigenous groups, in conjunction with the exposé works done by Saro-Wiwa, would assist in defending the group from environmental destruction and ethnic suppression. Shell's distinct detachment from the state's affairs would protect its assets against global protests in the aftermath of Saro-Wiwa's death. In the process of defending their community, the Ogoni ultimately exposed the nefarious practices of oil production in Ogoniland on an international scale. In the aftermath of Saro-Wiwa's death, testimony from Nigerian government officials would implicate them in their role of promoting violence and terror in the Niger Delta. By illustrating Shell's invisible force in dictating rule and policy, Saro-Wiwa's works, and the Ogoni movement succeeded in exposing the neo-colonial dynamic between Nigeria and Shell.

2 OIL EXPLORATION AND THE MAKING OF THE NIGERIAN STATE

On August 18th, 1957, an article from the New York Times announced to the world that a “‘Good Show of Free Oil’ [was] Struck in Nigeria by Shell-British Unit.” This oil was discovered in the small river community of Oloibiri in the Niger Delta just 90 kilometers west of Port Harcourt. Though minor sources of oil had been discovered earlier in the 1950s, the well in Oloibiri was the first to produce commercial quantities that met Shell-BP’s standards. Shell-BP soon built a pipeline from Port Harcourt, which was the largest nearby trading town, to Oloibiri. The estimated cost was “about 10,000,000 barrels of crude oil, according to company estimates.”⁸ Despite a reported six years of oil exploration in the region, the Oloibiri Well was only the eleventh well drilled by the corporation. Over the course of that time, Shell-BP spent around \$33,600,000 on prospecting in Nigeria.⁹ Though the time and capital used to make this first discovery were significant, oil exploration in Nigeria did not start with Shell. In fact, Shell’s discovery in Oloibiri closed a fifty-year intermittent exploratory process that began in 1903 and spanned across several companies.

The following chapter provides necessary contextual information on the formation of colonial Nigeria and oil exploration efforts from around 1903 until 1957. During this period, I argue, the British colonial government crafted the ideal environment for a hegemonic take-over of the Niger Delta’s resources. This created a point of leverage for the Shell/D’Arcy corporation to influence regional policy in favor of the corporation. Thus, the colonial and independent neo-colonial periods were not separate phenomena - developing one after the other - but rather an overlapping process. As the oil exploration effort transitioned from several small exploration

⁸ Thomas F. Brady, “‘Good Show of Free Oil’ Struck in Nigeria by Shell-British Unit,” *The New York Times*, August 18, 1956, Special edition, 1.

⁹ Thomas Brady, “Good Show of Free Oil,” 2.

companies to a large joint venture, Shell/D'Arcy played to the desires of colonial officers by offering royalties to the British government in exchange for a control of a potential multi-million-dollar industry. In addition to the story of oil exploration, I also want to trace the historical patterns of indigenous opposition in response to further colonization. A closer examination of the colonial formation of Southern Nigeria, oil exploration, and the rise of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) will illustrate how the battle waged between transnational corporate entities and corrupt governance and local groups seeking self-autonomy in the 1990s can be traced to the beginning of colonization.

2.1 Colonial Niger Delta and Initial Exploration Efforts

Prior to the arrival of British forces in the late 19th century, the Niger Delta was an ecologically diverse landscape inhabited mostly by the Ijo people. They, along with other ethnic groups in the area, lived in small fishing towns scattered across the river delta. These communities used their resources with modesty, ensuring that their agriculture and hunting never disrupted the natural ecology. The Niger Delta is comprised of four ecological zones: the coastal barrier islands, the mangrove swamp forests, freshwater swamps, and lowland rain forests.¹⁰ A rich variety of animals, flora, fauna, and other plant life existed in each of these four zones. With the arrival of Portuguese explorers in the 15th century, more Europeans began investigating various parts of Africa. For the British, rumors about the wealth of diverse plant-life tempted early explorers to navigate the exotic landscape. Prior to the arrival of British forces, the people living along the Niger Delta existed in relative peace.

¹⁰ Sanya Osha, "Birth of the Ogoni Movement," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 41, no. 2 (2006): 107-109.

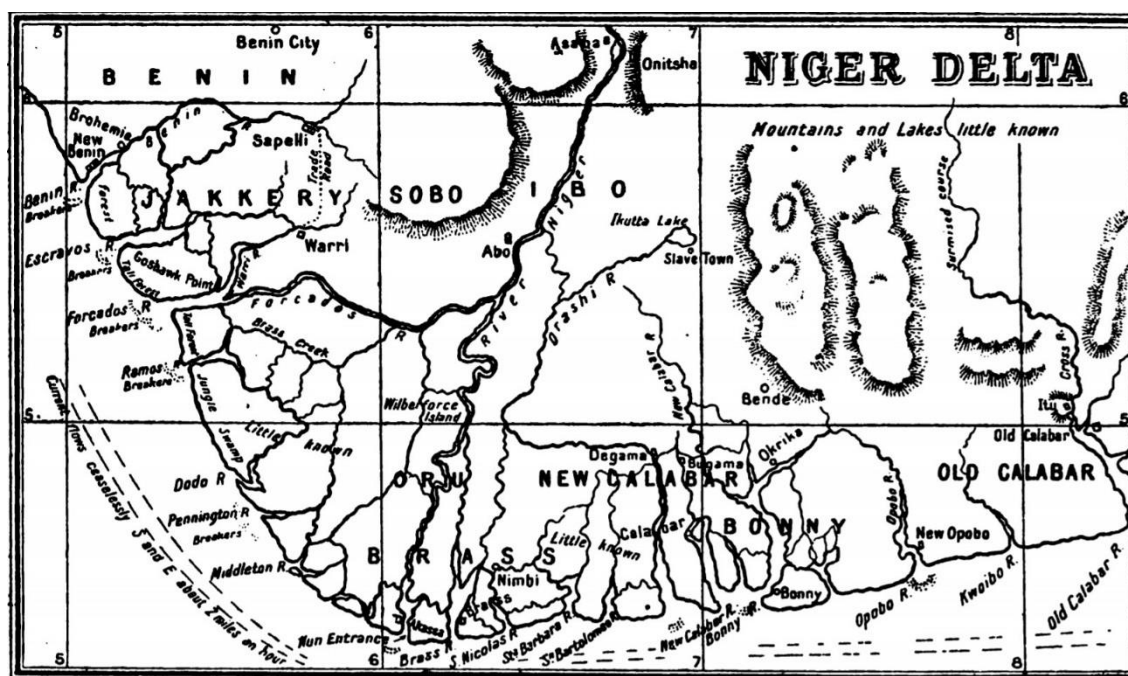


Figure 1: Map of the Niger Delta c. 1880. Found in Harold Bindloss, *In the Niger Country*.

The British arrived in Nigeria in the early 18th century with the intent to expand the West African slave trade. From the 16th to 19th centuries, the slave trade transformed the once small fishing towns along the Niger Delta into large trading centers like the towns of Bonny, Okrika, Owome (New Calabar), and Brass (Nembe). The increasing demand for enslaved labor over the years led slave capturers to expand their business across Africa. The Niger Delta was now home to dozens of ethnic groups with their own native languages.¹¹ As the movement towards the abolishment of slavery popularized in Great Britain, the slave trade diminished over the course of the 19th century. The main source of commerce between the British and the people of the Niger Delta soon transitioned from enslaved people to palm oil. This locally grown plant could be used to lubricate industrial machinery, as well as for soap and margarine. British officials saw an opportunity to transform this plant into a commodity and set up headquarters in Lagos in

¹¹ E. J. Alagoa, "Long Distance Trade and States in the Niger Delta," *The Journal of African History* 11, no. 3 (1970): 319–24.

1850. By 1856, over 25,000 tons of palm oil were produced and shipped from Lagos to Britain.

The exponential need for palm oil, in addition to other mineral prospects in the region, influenced the Crown to revise its relationship to the region in the 1880s.¹²

The 1885 Oil Rivers Protectorate marked a stark transition of authority from local chiefdoms to the British Crown. In retrospect, this might appear as the Crown's first step toward colonization. British counsels and the legislature, however, did not see this protectorate as such. In response to a complaint from one of many chiefs in the Niger Delta, British official Consul Hewett clarified that Britain was uninterested in taking the territory: "I write as you request with reference to the word 'protection' as used in the proposed Treaty that the Queen does not want to take your country... but at the same time, is anxious that no other nation should take them. She undertakes to extend her gracious favour and protection which will leave your country still under your government."¹³ Despite Britain's best efforts to present their protectorate policy as merely protection, regional kingdoms grew anxious over potential colonial overthrow. King Jaja of Opobo had effectively monopolized the palm oil trade in his region during the 1880s. When British counsel requested his approval to declare his kingdom part of a British protectorate, he refused because, under provisions of the protectorate, King Jaja could not tax British traders for palm oil. In response, British vice consul Henry Hamilton Johnston invited Jaja to negotiations in Britain in 1887. However, upon his arrival, King Jaja was arrested and exiled to the West Indies. In the face of increasing demands for regional autonomy over palm oil exports, British officials changed their business strategies. From 1891 to 1895, Britain overthrew the several kingdoms

¹² Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights, and Oil* (London: Verso, 2003), 4-11; Ateji Mark Okorobia and Stephen Temegha Olali, "The Historical Trajectory of Crude Oil Exploration and Production in Nigeria, 1930 – 2015" in *The Political Ecology of Oil and Gas Activities in the Nigerian Aquatic Ecosystem* (London: Elsevier Science & Technology), 17-19.

¹³ Parl. Papers. *Africa*, No. 4 (1885) C. 4279 in J. C. Anene, "The Foundations of British Rule in 'Southern Nigeria' (1885-1891)," *Historical Society of Nigeria* 1, no. 4 (December 1959): 254.

that comprised the Oil Rivers Protectorate and consolidated the area under the Southern Nigeria Protectorate.¹⁴

On January 1, 1914, the Northern and Southern Nigerian Protectorates were amalgamated into the British colony of Nigeria. Sir Frederick Lugard was appointed as Governor General of the colony and Lagos became the capital city. He created an Executive Council comprised of a small group of British elites and an advisory board of Nigerian authorities and British elites known as the Nigerian Council. Governor Lugard's most significant political contribution while in office was his policy of indirect rule. Indirect rule, on paper, granted Nigerian rulers the responsibility of day-to-day government administration in their district. British officials would serve as supervisors to these districts, ensuring to only intervene in administrative affairs indirectly and when necessary. In reality, British officials acted as the principal executive and judicial officer in their districts.¹⁵ This mode of governance, according to historian J. Okoro Ijoma, could only function in a society with these three factors: "a stratified society, consisting of a ruling aristocracy and a peasantry; a degree of social immobility preventing persons of a lower class from advancing to a higher one; and an identity of interests between the ruling class and the colonial power."¹⁶ From 1914 onward, the colonial administration strived to perpetuate inequality and ensure that the majority of wealth produced in the country resided in the hands of the minority elite rather than the majority of the country. Indirect rule became a defining element of Nigerian politics not only during the colonial administration, but throughout most of the 20th century.

¹⁴ J. C. Anene, "The Foundations of British Rule," 259; Chijloke Uwasomba and Victor Alumona, "Militancy in the Niger Delta and the Deepening Crisis of the Oil Economy in Nigeria," *African Development* 38, no. 3–4 (2013): 23–24; Ike Okonta and Orono Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 17–21.

¹⁵ J Okoro Ijoma, "Nigeria's Path to Western Democracy 1900–1960," *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* 5, no.2 (1993): 30–33.

¹⁶ J Okoro Ijoma, "Nigeria's Path to Western Democracy," 32.

The industrialization movement in early 20th century Britain inspired government officials and companies to broaden their resource portfolio in Nigeria. Palm oil remained an essential commodity throughout the late 19th and early 20th century, but it was not their sole interest for long. During this time, new technologies like the internal-combustion engine spurred British oil companies to expand their natural resource horizons. Britain's main source of oil came from small shale-oil companies in Scotland. International oil imports came from Canada, Trinidad, Egypt, Burma, and Brunei in 1900.¹⁷ The British, however, had no control over the pricing for this oil. Additionally, the distance from each of these five countries meant oil at times took months to travel from extraction sites to the British mainland. Thus, when speculative efforts for oil began within Nigeria in 1903, a small collection of low-capital oil corporations turned their attention to Africa.

British oil companies began their exploratory surveys in the Nigerian Protectorate in 1903. Nigeria Properties Limited (Ltd.), Nigeria, West African Development Syndicate Ltd., and the Northern Nigeria Exploration Syndicate were among the first corporations to conduct these surveys. Their efforts were unsuccessful, and the companies ran out of funding by 1905. That same year, the Nigerian Bitumen Corporation (NBC), managed by Frank Drader, purchased the exploratory concessions from these first explorers and soon began their search. The company managed to discover several possible oil wells between 1908 and 1912, including a site which was described as “by far the most important event which occurred during the company’s operations.”¹⁸ Even with their most significant discovery, the company never found a prosperous

¹⁷ Phia Steyn, “Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria, c. 1903–58,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 37, no. 2 (June 2009): 253–57; Soala Ariweriokuma, *The Political Economy of Oil and Gas in Africa: The Case of Nigeria*, Routledge Studies in International Business, and the World Economy 45 (London: Routledge, 2009), 13-16.

¹⁸ Steyn, “Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria, c. 1903–58,” 254.

site for oil or natural gas and NBC abandoned their efforts in 1914. The start of the war halted all oil exploration in the colony, as the nation's leading corporations switched their focus to producing war materials. While preliminary investigations for oil in Nigeria proved unfruitful, the discovery of smaller deposits of oil hinted at a potential for a grander commercial source. It was clear that for a robust oil industry to emerge in the colony, more money was needed to invest in tools, licenses, and explorers.¹⁹

2.2 The Mineral Oils Ordinance and the Shell/D'Arcy Corporation

Prior to 1950, Shell-BP was known as the Shell/D'Arcy Corporation. The corporation's eventual hegemonic control of oil resources in the Niger Delta can be attributed to what Jędrzej Georg-Frynas calls "first mover advantage."²⁰ The company benefited from a key piece of legislation in Nigeria which prohibited non-British companies from applying for concessionary licenses to explore for oil. This act, known as the Mineral Oils Ordinance, was passed in Nigeria in 1907 and effectively banned companies not managed by British subjects from prospecting for any mineral resources within the Nigerian colony. Only the Crown could "grant leases of mineral oils in or under any lands in Nigeria" and, once a company discovered oil or bitumen, then "no further licenses to drill for and work mineral oils shall be issued."²¹ The ordinance not only protected future companies from competing in the region, but it also guaranteed the originating company's right to explore any land granted in the license, regardless of ownership. If the

¹⁹ Steyn, "Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria, c. 1903–58," 255–63.

²⁰ Jędrzej George Frynas, Matthias Beck, and Kamel Mellahi, "Maintaining Corporate Dominance after Decolonization: The 'First Mover Advantage' of Shell-BP in Nigeria," *Review of African Political Economy* 27, no. 85 (September 2000): 408.

²¹ Sir Donald Kingdon, "The Laws of Nigeria: Containing the Ordinances of Nigeria, in Force on the 1st Day of January 1923, and the Orders, Proclamations, Rules, Regulations and Bye-Laws Made Thereunder, in Force on the 1st Day of May 1923, and the Principal Imperial Statutes, Orders in Council, Letters Patent and Royal Instructions Relating to Nigeria," Nigeria, 1923, 966.

landowner opposed company intervention on their property or obstructed the company from excavating, they would be punished by imprisonment and a hefty fine.²²

The Mineral Oils Ordinance was opposed by all twelve Nigerian-native members of the Nigerian Council, who saw that these revisions granted British companies the ability to purchase land from Native authorities without consent nor royalty for discovered minerals. Council member C. S. Sapara Williams proposed an amendment to Section 5 of the ordinance to guarantee “a fair and reasonable proportion of the royalties received from the minerals oils obtained” to the property owner of that land.²³ His suggestion was voted down by most of the legislature and vetoed by Governor Lugard. The Nigerian members of the legislature were not the only ones to openly oppose the 1907 Mineral Oils Ordinance. *The Lagos Standard*, a newspaper sourced from Lagos and run by African elites, published a piece on the ordinance shortly after its passing. Written shortly after the ordinance’s approval was shared with the public, the editorial alluded to the potential of racialized exploitation: “If the ordinance become law, or rather when [it] *does* become law, it will give the Government and the European prospector the kernel of the oil mining business, leaving to the Native the shell in other words giving him the doubtful privilege of working to enrich the white man.”²⁴

Shortly after World War I, the D’Arcy Exploration Company applied for exploratory licenses in Nigeria. As one of the largest oil suppliers in Britain, the company took advantage of the Mineral Oils Ordinance and became the leading force in the search for oil. In 1918, the company hoped to expand its market and compete with Royal Dutch/Shell and applied for a series of exploratory licenses all over the world, including in Nigeria. While most of the

²² Sir Donald Kingdon, “The Laws of Nigeria,” 967.

²³ Steyn, “Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria, c. 1903–58,” 255.

²⁴ N.a., *The Lagos Standard*, April 1907, 1.

concessions dissipated in the 1920s due to lack of any promising discoveries, the company's licenses and arrangements remained valid with the colonial government. Sir Walter Greenway, the Chairman of Anglo-Persian and its subsidiary D'Arcy Exploration Corporation, received approval in 1921 for a license to explore the area from Dahomey (modern day Benin), west of the Niger River, to the Akassa Mouth located in the southernmost tip of Nigeria in Bayelsa State..²⁵ From 1921 to 1924, the company conducted extensive reconnaissance work and geological surveys which were reported to be tough and arduous.²⁶ After years of excavating with little return, the exploration company did not invest any further into Nigeria. E. H. Cunningham Craig, a head geological adviser for D'Arcy, wrote to Sir Greenway that, "the report [on Southern Nigeria] adds nothing to what I knew in 1906. It is not worth spending another cent on the Concession."²⁷ Though their preliminary search revealed little, the D'Arcy Exploration Company did not give up its mission to become a leading oil company in the global marketplace. They would soon return in the 1930s with the help of a major competitor.

In 1933, one of D'Arcy's leading geologists submitted a geological report to the company illustrating several promising sites for commercial oil along the Niger Delta. The report, and subsequent reports that held similar findings, led the company to re-apply for an exploratory license in conjunction with the Royal Dutch/Shell. There is little hard evidence that explains why D'Arcy choose Shell to collaborate in a joint venture. We can only infer that Shell's vast amount of capital, combined with their inability to access oil in Nigeria due to the Mineral Oils Ordinance Act, likely played a significant role in formation of the partnership. The joint venture,

²⁵ Soala Ariweriokuma, *The Political Economy of Oil and Gas in Africa* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2009), 23-30; Phia Steyn, "Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria," 254.

²⁶ Cally Njeze, "Oil Concessions and Land Acquisitions in Nigeria," PhD. Dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1978, 166.

²⁷ Note from the chief geologists to Messrs. D'Arcy Exploration Co. Ltd, Southern Nigerian Concession: Advisors' Opinions, in Phia Steyn, "Oil Exploration in Colonial Nigeria," 259.

under the name Shell/D'Arcy, was approved and their exploratory license of the entire colony (357,000 square miles) in 1938. From 1938 to 1941, the company conducted surveys across the region. Over time, their research indicated that the Southern Nigerian coast, particularly the Niger Delta, was far more likely to have great deposits of oil than Northern Nigeria. As World War II broke out in 1941, the Shell/D'Arcy company had to halt its oil exploration to shift their attention to the war effort. The company would return after the war in 1946, only to be met by a rising nationalist movement opposed to colonial authority.²⁸

Despite decades of unsuccessful attempts to find an oil deposit large enough to prove profitable, D'Arcy geologists and executives continued their efforts to find a steady source of oil. Crucial to their endeavors was the Mineral Oils Ordinance, which prevented foreign companies not chaired by British subjects from affording concessions. It is important to note that concession licenses under the ordinance did not prescribe the terms or conditions of oil operations. The terms were instead dictated by the colonial government. If a corporation, like D'Arcy, paid for an oil exploratory license (OEL), they would need to prove their discovery to the colonial government and the government would need to determine if their discovery warranted a separate license for drilling and extraction. Additionally, a company had to relinquish its license after a certain timeframe, set by the colonial government, if it had no evidence that oil was within that geographic area.²⁹ These policies influenced Shell/D'Arcy's operational exploration zone over time. As demonstrated by Figure 1 the company's joint exploration concession would shrink from 1950 to 1952. Closing further into the Niger Delta along the coast, it would not be too long

²⁸ Phia Steyn, "Oil Exploration in Nigeria," 261-63; Chijloke Uwasomba and Victor Alumona, "Militancy in the Niger Delta and the Deepening Crisis of the Oil Economy in Nigeria," 24-26; Charles Udosen et. al, "Fifty Years of Oil Exploration in Nigeria: The Paradox of Plenty," *Global Journal of Social Sciences*, 8, no. 2 (June 2009): 37.

²⁹ Jedzrej Georg Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria: Conflict and Litigation between Oil Companies and Village Communities*, Politics and Economics in Africa, 1 (Piscataway: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 13.

before the joint company would finally be rewarded for their years of surveying. Their potential victory, however, would be contested by regional activists, motivated to once and for all claim independence against the British government.

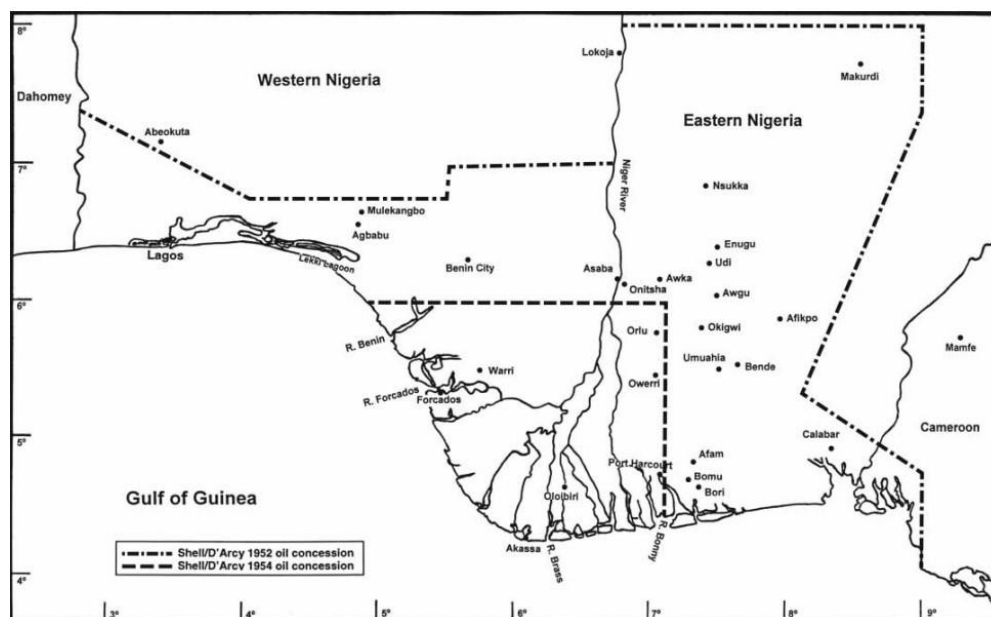


Figure 2: Map of Southern Nigeria from Phia Steyn's "Oil Exploration in Nigeria."

2.3 Rise of the Resistance: The National Cameroon and Nigeria Cooperation

In the post-World War II era, nationalist movements arose across Africa. African soldiers, who were vilified and viewed as inferior by their colonial governments had been drafted into war, fighting alongside Europeans on equal footing. The war effort dramatically changed the colonial dynamic between the British and Nigerians as Nigerian veterans and citizens alike called for more representation and voice in their governments' affairs.³⁰ Prior to the war in 1939, Southern Nigeria was divided into Eastern and Western Nigeria while the north remained unchanged. The decision placed most of Nigeria's valuable resources in the East and

³⁰ Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 23-25; James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) 54-61; Raji Yusuf and Abejide Samuel, "Shell D'Arcy Exploration & the Discovery of Oil as Important Foreign Exchange Earnings in Ijawland of Niger Delta, C. 1940s-1970," *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* 2, no. 11 (June 2013): 24-25.

subsequently created an indigenous elite class in the main city of Lagos.³¹ Within the context of these broader social and political changes, the Shell/D'Arcy Corporation returned to Nigeria in 1946 and focused its operations on Eastern Nigeria in the Owerri, Okigwi and Umuahia regions. While the colonial government was glad to support the joint venture in accomplishing its task of finding viable oil, many locals felt quite different.

Under the leadership of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons became a major oppositional organization for nationalists whose goal was self-autonomy. The council brought together several smaller nationalist parties and labor unions with the broad aim of gaining independence from Britain. Azikiwe became a vocal opponent of Britain's increasingly authoritative presence within his part of Eastern Nigeria. In 1947, he was invited to speak on the Americans All Broadcast. The show was funded by the U.S. Office of Education and it discussed immigrant issues, outlined global affairs, and promoted immigrant contributions to society. During the interview, Azikiwe explained the demands of his party's anti-colonial movement: "The demands would include a request for a more democratic constitution for Nigeria, a request that the British respect the protectorate status and mandate the position of Nigeria and the Cameroons instead of governing them as exclusive British possessions and a suggestion for the modification of four laws affecting the lands, minerals, and chiefs of Nigeria."³² The four laws, also referred to as the "four obnoxious ordinances," included the Crown Land Ordinance, the Public Land Acquisitions Ordinance, the Appointment and Deposition of Chiefs Ordinance, and the Mineral Oils Ordinance. Azikiwe used other organizations' platforms, as well as his own *West African Pilot* newspaper, to articulate the problems of the colonial government. During the late 1940s, his paper featured several

³¹ Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 22.

³² "Africans Plan London Visit for 'Rights,'" *Atlanta Daily World*, July 6, 1947, 1.

complaints from the Ikeduru, the Orodo, and the Mbama peoples who shared a similar grievance against the colonizers and the Shell/D'Arcy corporation who were trying to monetize their property.³³ The rise of fragmented local groups with larger centralized organizations eventually came to a point where the government and Shell/D'Arcy had to intervene.

Amid a potentially violent uprising, the colonial government and Shell/D'Arcy changed their approach to communal affairs. Initially the company and government tried to attribute the violence across the colony to Azikiwe and the nationalist movement. The government also sent police to the Ikeduru and Orodo to intimidate with violence if anyone obstructed exploration parties from doing their jobs. The use of violence did not stop protests, however, so the company and government released statements clarifying the Mineral Oils Ordinance and oil exploratory conduct. Government officials published a statement which explained how Shell did not have the right to explore anyone's land without permission and that, if any damages occurred on private property, the company would compensate the aggrieved.³⁴ Shell/D'Arcy also began circulating the specifics of their exploration conduct to local communities – something that had not occurred prior to 1949. These statements appeared to quell violent encounters between police protecting exploratory efforts and protestors. It did not, however, halt the movement toward independence.

In 1948, the newly appointed Governor of the colonial administration, Sir John Macpherson, announced publicly that he would draft a new constitution to allow for greater participation in government affairs. The Macpherson Constitution, which passed in 1952, gave more fiscal and legislative power to regional assemblies across Nigeria. Each region – Northern, Western, and Eastern – was allowed a certain number of seats in the legislature based on the size

³³ Steyn, "Oil Exploration in Nigeria," 264-66; Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Zik: A Selection from the Speeches of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Governor General of the Federation of Nigeria, Formerly President of the Nigerian State, Formerly Premier of the Eastern Region of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 322-24.

³⁴ *Daily Times*, 5 August 1949, 1.

of that region's population.³⁵ Though these efforts to bring some democracy to Nigeria appeared generous, Macpherson's main objective was to preserve the colonial administration. World War II placed Britain in tremendous economic debt and the movement for independence in Nigeria only grew from 1945 to 1960. Adapting the colonial structure became the only means of retaining Britain's control over Nigeria's valuable resources.

In addition to revising governmental structures, MacPherson also aimed to address the concerns of profit-sharing with future oil revenue. The governor drafted a list of four demands for the Shell/D'Arcy company to accept before applying for additional licenses:

- (1) The formation of a new local Company for the special purpose of developing Nigeria's oil resources.
- (2) Some system whereby the Nigerian Government would share in the profits earned by the company.
- (3) Government to have the right to appoint one director to the Board of the Company.
- (4) The Nigerian public to have the opportunity of subscribing a certain proportion of the share capital of the Company.³⁶

Shell/D'Arcy executives declined all these revisions. The company did not understand why the government wished to depart from the laws based on the Mineral Oils Ordinance. Governor MacPherson warned the company that it could lose its financial hold in Nigeria, but the company did not budge. On November 19, 1949, the members of the Executive Council voted unanimously with Shell/D'Arcy, which effectively overruled Macpherson's proposed amendments and kept the exploration and extraction licenses as promised.³⁷ Though the council was proud of its decision, and indeed quite excited about the potential profit they would accumulate when Shell/D'Arcy discovered oil, they did not realize that their vote marked a stern

³⁵ Ike Okonta and Orono Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 17.

³⁶ Brief record of a discussion held at Government House, Lagos, on Thursday, 15th Sept. 1949, CO 852/982/5, NA in Steyn, "Oil Exploration in Nigeria," 265.

³⁷ Jędrzej George Frynas, Matthias Beck, and Kamel Mellahi, "Maintaining Corporate Dominance after Decolonization: The 'First Mover Advantage' of Shell-BP in Nigeria," *Review of African Political Economy* 27, no. 85 (September 2000): 407–16; Steyn, "Oil Exploration in Nigeria," 266–67

transition in power relations. While the government adopted a model for oil exploration that greatly favored the British-led Shell/D'Arcy conglomerate, the power of renewing licenses and permitting the company to conduct its business came from them.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter on oil exploration in Nigeria examined the longer historical developments that shaped the region and created an environment conducive to developing a lucrative oil business. The creation of the Oil Rivers Protectorate in 1896 consolidated a collection of loose kingdoms comprising different ethnic groups into a centralized region with a metropole in Lagos. Though the transition from protectorate to colony was not immediate, the growing demands for natural resources and Nigeria's proximity to Britain made colonization an easy decision for the Crown. Under the colonial government, the Nigerian legislature soon passed laws like the Mineral Oils Ordinance Act which protected any future resources found in Nigeria from international competition. Though oil exploration efforts were originally not successful, the enthusiasm of business leaders like Sir Walter Greenway led a few key British oil corporations to continue investing in licenses and equipment. Before commercial quantities of oil were even discovered, the Shell/D'Arcy corporation held tremendous influence on regional policy. They were able to negotiate the price of concessionary licenses to cut costs and decline Sir John MacPherson's revisions to their contract. This shift in power dynamics – from the government dictating the limitations of oil companies to the inverse – is indicative of the transfer Nigeria underwent from a colonial to neo-colonial state.

Despite the power of the colonial government and Shell/D'Arcy, opposition to these colonizing powers persisted over the 20th century. The most successful of these movements, the NCNC led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, impacted the way in which Shell/D'Arcy conducted their

exploratory efforts and forced the government to amend the Mineral Oils Ordinance to protect native-owned land. Though his fight against colonialism would come to an end in October 1960, the neo-colonial system which emerged after independence proved that fight against foreign rule in Nigeria would wage on. In the years to follow, Shell/D'Arcy (soon to be Shell-BP) would find themselves in an economic and politically influential position. After striking a significant deposit in Oloibiri in 1957, the first shipment of Nigerian crude oil arrived in Rotterdam in March of 1958. The first shipment notified to foreign oil companies, which were now permitted exploration licenses per the 1957 Mineral Ordinance revision, that it was time to start drilling. Soon, Mobil, Gulf Oil, Tennessee Gas Transmission, and the Italian firm ENI applied for licenses to begin drilling. The start of an expansive oil industry was emerging.

3 THE RISE AND FALL OF INDEPENDENCE



Figure 3: Gathering of celebrants at the Racecourse on September 30, 1960. Image courtesy of the BBC.

Despite the positive perspectives conveyed thus-far, a handful of worrying controversies troubled some spectators. A few weeks prior, the government faced serious backlash regarding the announcement of the new national anthem. The anthem itself was a product of a contest hosted by the Nigerian Federal Government. The winner was a British ballet musician, and the language of the anthem was English. This was a problem. For some locals, the melody and cadence were too foreign and failed to capture the Nigerian spirit. For others, the sheer thought that the nation's own independent anthem was not composed by a Nigerian warranted disgust and betrayal.³⁸ In spite of the backlash, the anthem was adopted just days after independence on

³⁸ Ezekiel Mphahlele, "Nigeria on the Eve of Independence," *Africa Today* 7, no. 6 (October 1960): 4.

October 4th. But beyond just the nation's song, there were serious concerns over the distribution of power between the three federations. In the years after World War II, three main political parties took hold of the Nigerian House of Representatives: The Northern People's Congress (N.P.C.), the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C.), and the Action Group (A.G.). The N.P.C., led by Chief Ahmadu Bello, ruled the North, the N.C.N.C., led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, ruled the East and the A.G., led by Chief Obefemi Awolowo, ruled the West. The federal system, which allowed for each region to maintain a powerful government, effectively granted the people of each region to develop and grow autonomously in accordance with those regions values and traditions: "The N.C.N.C. has a looseness of structure that has something to do with what one may call the republican spirit of the Easterners – the individualism and independence of mind of the Ibo... The people of the West (A.G.) pride themselves on statesmanship and debating ability... insisting that more states should be created, based on ethnological and cultural affinities; this, to provide a safeguard against 'minority fears....' Equally authoritarian is the N.P.C. Muslim sanctions give it a feudal look and character—and indeed it is often feudal in its attitudes and in its dealings with those it rules."³⁹ The decade of independence, from 1960 to 1969, the question of balance and control remained heavily contested.

In the following chapter, I will examine the period between independence in 1960 and 1990. This era is crucial to my arguments regarding neo-colonialism as it marks the exponential growth of the oil industry alongside its many conflicts. The first section, *The Biafra War and International Influence*, demonstrates how the preservation of the colonial-era federal system heightened tensions between Northern and Eastern Nigeria. Additionally, this section will build

³⁹ Mphahlele, "Nigeria on the Eve of Independence," 6.

on recent discussions on Britain's role during the war and the influence of oil investments in foreign policy. The next section, *The Yom Kippur War and the Growth of the Petroleum Industry*, traces the aftermath of the civil war and how Nigeria became a predominant figure in the international crude oil market. As the oil industry grew due to global shortages, the percentage allocated to the region where oil was extracted and processed diminished greatly, leading to greater strife and poverty in the Niger Delta while Shell and the federal government grew mass wealth. The very last section, *Rebellious River Communities – From Ijaw to Ogoni*, follows the story from Isaac Boro's unsuccessful attempt to create an independent Niger Delta state to Ken Saro-Wiwa's creation of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP).

In this chapter, I argue that the pivot towards mass-oil production in the 1970s diminished any possibility for a truly independent state. Recently released records from the London Archives illustrate how British policy during the Biafran War was fueled by protecting Shell-BP's refineries and pipelines. This preservation ensured that British authorities – through the Shell-BP corporation – could protect their influence on the political and economic governance of the country. From 1970 to 1975, the leadership under President Yakuba Gowon prioritized a mono-export economy that prioritized oil at the cost of agriculture and other exports. In conjunction with agreements which elevated federal income from petroleum, Gowon and those close to the government amounted serious capital by renegotiating revenue divisions and ensuring majority equity-shares in Shell-BP. As a result, government red-lining that would typically protect the environment from cheap and careless business practices was effectively absent or non-enforceable. As a result, those living near oil sites and pipelines in the Niger Delta were increasingly more adamant about protections and more critical of their government's

apathy. The era between 1967 and 1980, I argue, is the period with which colonial dynamics took on a more neo-colonial form by obfuscating the role of Shell-BP in shaping government policy and inaction.

3.1 The Biafran War and International Influence

On May 30th, 1967, chief justice of the Eastern Region, Sir Louis Mbanefo, created the Biafra Republic from the former Eastern Region. The decision to break away from Nigeria, as its leaders stated to the public, was to “fulfill the decolonizing mission which the ‘still-born’ Nigeria failed to do.”⁴⁰ Their government, under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, would strive towards the principles of humanism and prosperity. The result of this project, however, would stray gravely from the vision of its founders. Its sheer existence would soon warrant a 3-year blockade and military invasion from Nigeria. The causes of the civil war – which, from here on, will be referred to as the Biafran War – are often pinned to colonialism and growing tensions between the Hausa and Igbo. The fact that a nation like Nigeria, comprised of hundreds of ethnic groups with varying interests, could peacefully exist and ensure a balance of power was at best utopic. General Ojukwu recognized such in his memoir on the Biafran War: “Nigeria never was and can never be a united country.... Her only claim to form and sense was to be found in the nostalgic ruminations of the withered minds of ex-colonial office wallahs.”⁴¹ Inequal investment and the power distribution characteristic of colonial-Nigeria certainly played a role in the war between Nigeria and Biafra. Though assuming that colonialism is the root cause is, perhaps, too deterministic. Afterall, why would it take seven

⁴⁰ Samuel Fury Childs Daly, *A History of the Republic of Biafra: Law, Crime, and the Nigerian Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1.

⁴¹ Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, *Biafra: Selected Speeches and Random Thoughts of C. Odumegwu Ojukwu* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 1.

years for Biafra to declare secession if the writing was already on the wall? Why the year 1967, and not at or even prior to Nigerian independence?

The timing of the conflict is best explained by the series of escalations between the Northern and Eastern Regions between 1966 and 1967. It began on January 15, 1966, when a group called the “five majors” overthrew the Azikiwe presidency in the first military coup. The majors, representing each of the three regions of Nigeria, killed Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, arrested every regional premier, and placed Major General John Aguiyi-Ironsi in charge of the country. Ironsi outlawed political parties and elections all together in favor of military-governance, with each region being assigned a new governor. On May 24, 1966, he replaced the federal system with a unitary system, effectively carving Nigeria into various “groups of provinces” and granted military and civil administrative services from the federal government. From the perspective of many Northerners, this was concerning. Ironsi was an Igbo from the East, keeping most high-level state positions to other Igbo. The replacement of the federal system left Northerners with little political leverage and the fear of military occupation. A counter coup erupted in July of that year, Ironsi was captured and the northern officers responsible for the coup placed Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon as supreme commander. Upon assuming office, Gowon reinstated the federal system while retaining the same military governors to ensure stability. Between July and September 1966, tensions between the North and East rose exponentially. Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu, the Igbo governor of the Eastern Region, General Gowon spurred a genocide against Igbos living in the North, leading to the death of ~90,000 Igbo civilians by September 1966. General Ojukwu retaliated by murdering thousands

of Hausa Northerners living in the Eastern Region.⁴² It grew abundantly clear that national reconciliation would prove difficult. Only a war could possibly ease tensions.

To view this conflict within the lens of neo-colonialism requires us to trace two separate yet intertwined systems. One, the colonial infrastructure which carried into independent Nigeria perpetuated ethnic and religious tensions when it came to federal authority. The issues of political and economic control over the region certainly played a passive role in Biafran secession. The second, however, necessitates a more international perspective. Scholarship on Britain's role in the Biafra War has received plentiful discussion. Works like Suzanne Cronje's *The World and Nigeria* and John Stremlau's *the International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War* framed Britain's involvement in the war as a means of combatting Soviet interests.⁴³ While this certainly holds some truth, recent discoveries from the British archives indicate that protection of economic assets played a far greater role than previously conceived. Public statements at the start of the war from the British Secretary of State Mr. Michael Stewart emphasized the need to prevent break-up of Nigeria. Their advertised foreign policy, referred to as 'One Nigeria,' aimed to protect the national boundaries, for if "they were to be afflicted by tribal cessions, by one tribe and then another wanting to break away from the state to which it belonged there would be a real danger of tearing the whole of Africa into a kind of tribal patchwork which would leave Africa impoverished and unable to face the strenuous age in which we now live."⁴⁴

⁴² Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, "Instability and Civil War, 1960 - 1970" In *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 172-177; Jean Herskovitz, "Nigeria: Africa's New Power," *Foreign Affairs* 53 (1975): 328-31.

⁴³ Suzana Cronje, *The World and Nigeria: The Diplomatic History of the Biafran War* (New York: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972) and John Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977) in Bryan McNeil, "The Nigerian Civil War in History and Historiography," In *Africa, Empire and Globalization: Essays in Honour of A. G. Hopkins* (Durham: North Carolina Academic Press, 2014), 541-46.

⁴⁴ Mr. Stewart, Telegram, "Briefs for Secretary of State's Visit, 1968," Telegram, December 7, 1968, FCO 37/396, The National Archives London, 1.

Mr. Stewart's comments likely communicated well to the British public as it framed foreign involvement through empathic protection. In likelihood, Mr. Stewart and the Prime Minister at the time understood that their true intentions were less formidable, and thus hidden from the public until 2008. A note from an anonymous aide to Prime Minister Harold Wilson states explicitly the need to protect British investments in Nigerian oil:

To refer publicly in the House to our economic stake in Nigeria would be inadvisable as it would be misunderstood or misrepresented ... Nevertheless, the facts are that Shell and BP have invested at least £250 million in Nigeria on which we now expect a large and increasing return of great importance to the British balance of payments. Other investments are worth up to £175 million. Our annual export trade is about £90 million. 16,000 British subjects live in Nigeria. All this would be at risk if we abandoned our policy of support for the Federal Government and others would be quick to take our place.⁴⁵

Though oil production in Nigeria only accounted for ~10% of Britain's crude oil imports, the potentials for the market were enormous. Additionally, the blockade of the Suez Canal in June 1967 greatly disrupted oil freighters travelling from the Middle East, which was the world's leading oil supplier. Required to now travel around Cape Canaveral, shipping delays and the fears of diminished oil supply led British officials and Shell-BP to do everything in their power to protect Nigerian oil stations and tankers along the Niger Delta.

But it was not solely the British who understood the significance of Nigerian oil in the global market. On June 19th, 1967, General Ojukwu published the Revenue Collection (No. 2) Decree, which required any company operating within Biafra to pay the government royalties. Shell-BP initially accepted the request, as it appeared that Biafra was in control over its territory and could protect work sites from the Nigerian Federal Military.⁴⁶ Their position changed

⁴⁵ PRO FCO 65/67 in Chibuike Uche, "Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War," *The Journal of African History* 49, no. 1 (2008): 113.

⁴⁶ Ezewuchi Fidelis Amaefule, "External Costs of Oil and Gas Exploration in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," Dissertation, Argosy University, 2009, 20-21.

abruptly once the British government warned of a possible blockade should the company pay Biafra and not Nigeria its oil royalties. Shell officials attempted a work around by granting the royalty fee of 250,000 pounds in a secret account, but once word got out, the Nigerian Federal government instituted an embargo on oil tankers in Biafra. What would ensue for the next three years was torrential warfare, with the bulk of casualties being from Biafra. Britain aided in recapturing the city of Bonny in 1968 – where “the most valuable part of Shell-BP installations... the storage tanks, the pumping station and the tanker terminal are all at Bonny.”⁴⁷ Oil production soon rose from 142,000 barrels per day in 1968 to 540,000 by the end of 1969. By providing weapons and military equipment, the British aided the Nigerian government in capturing Biafra in January 1970.

3.2 The Yom Kippur War and the Growth of the Petroleum Industry

*“Secession” cried one; the other “One Nation”
 For oil is sweet, awoof no get bone.
 The task was done, the nation is one.
 We know who won and who got undone.
 No thought of keeping his body one
 It’s scattered from Bendel to Bonny Town*⁴⁸

The Nigerian poet Wole Soyinka offered his succinct summary of the Biafran War in his collection of poems published in 1984. The federal government’s victory marked a new era in the Nigerian political economy. Biafra dissolved into the Nigerian political framework, and instead of a federal division between North, East, South, and West, it was comprised of twelve states. The hope was to allocate more political leverage and to distribute revenues more equitably to specific territories than the broader regions they once encompassed. Former President General Ojukwu was chased out of the country and granted asylum from President Felix Houphouet-

⁴⁷ Uche, “Oil, British Interests and the Nigerian Civil War,” 131.

⁴⁸ Wole Soyinka, *Opera Wonyosi* (Ibadan: Collected Plays, 1983), 24.

Boigny of Cote-de-Ivoire. In a national effort to reconcile and recover the damages done to the eastern economy, people, and infrastructure, General Gowon announced a new reconciliation program. This program granted amnesty to those who fought for Biafra, provided governmental loans for infrastructure, and gave those living in the East minor compensation as Biafra currency was rendered useless. Most of these ideas never came to fruition.⁴⁹ Though the spirit of forgiveness and integration was central in Gowon's post-war policy.

What came after the war was a time where the Nigerian economy evolved from a diverse portfolio of agricultural and mineral exports to fossil-fuels. From 1971 to 1975, the Gowon regime took major steps to take control of oil revenue. Nigeria became the eleventh member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1971, alongside countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, Libya, and Algeria. The mission for OPEC was simple: 1. To ensure stable oil markets by protecting industrial nations from leveraging oil producing countries; 2. Secure an efficient and regular supply of petroleum to consumers; 3. To provide fair return on capital for entities investing in oil infrastructure or the industry.⁵⁰ OPEC's objectives as an international organization inspired Gowon to take more control over profit sharing in oil exportation. In May 1974, Shell-BP and the national government announced a mutual agreement that the federal government would claim 55 percent share in their company's operations through the Nigerian National Oil Company (NNOC). Lastly, the division of revenue between the federal government and the Niger Delta territory was redrawn. Whereas, in previous administrations, a

⁴⁹ Daly, *A History of the Republic of Biafra*, 170-71; Falola and Heaton, "Instability and Civil War," 175-177.

⁵⁰ Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, "Brief History," OPEC.org, 1.

state within Nigeria would receive 50% of all revenue from a locally sourced commodity, Decree 6 in 1975 allocated just 20% to a state while the federal government received 80%.⁵¹

The Gowon administrations' decisions all culminated in massive profits for Gowon and any close friends of the government while regional leaders, and especially the river communities living near oil extraction sites, earned little to nothing. To make matters worse, a global crisis in the Middle East emerged in 1973. The Yom Kippur War, fought between Israel and a coalition of Arab States, including Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC), a separate entity from OPEC with countries of overlapping membership, imposed an embargo against any countries in support of Israel. This effectively created a global shortfall. The price of a barrel of oil rose from \$3.00 USD to \$12.00 by the end of 1973.⁵² Both Shell-BP and the Gowon regime capitalized on the opportunity by funding infrastructure for an additional refinery in Warri, just south of the Western Region, along with thousands of miles of gas pipelines spanning close to 2/3rds of the Niger Delta. Between 1970 and the end of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Nigeria's percentage of petroleum exports relative to its entire economy grew from 57.5% to 93%.⁵³ This was an economic boom that the nation never witnessed before.

⁵¹ Herskovitz, "Nigeria," 330-331; Jędrzej George Frynas, Matthias Beck, and Kamel Mellahi, "Maintaining Corporate Dominance after Decolonization: The 'First Mover Advantage' of Shell-BP in Nigeria," *Review of African Political Economy* 27, no. 85 (September 2000): 417-21.

⁵² Frynas et. al, "Maintaining Corporate Dominance after Decolonization," 426-28.

⁵³ Lawrence Kumins, "Energy Shock: Oil and the Economy," *University of California Press* 69, no. 410 (November 1975): 189-91; Felix B. Dayo and Anthony O. Adegbulugbe, "Oil Demand Elasticities in Nigeria," *The Energy Journal* 8, no. 2 (April 1987): 37-40.

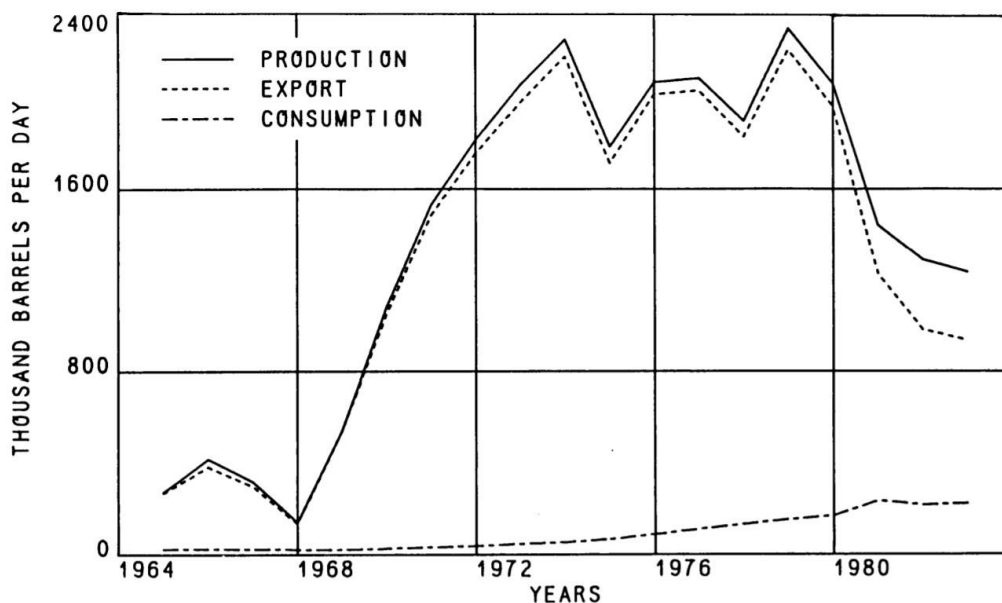


Figure 4 Barrels Per Day (BPD) production in Nigeria, in Felix B. Dayo and Anthony O. Adegbulugbe, “Oil Demand Elasticities in Nigeria.”

3.3 Rebellious River Communities – From Ijaw to Ogoni

Throughout the period of this chapter – 1960 to the 70s – and amid various national transformations in the Nigerian political and economic order, indigenous communities along the Niger Delta resisted forceful occupation and sought autonomy in a variety of ways. In 1958, a group of elders in the river communities created the Rivers Chiefs People’s Conference, a political party with the intent of creating a separate state within the Nigerian polity. The culmination of their efforts was a series of discussions with colonial administrators in the Constitutional Conference in London who unanimously agreed that, given the upcoming independence, they had no authority to grant their request.⁵⁴ post-independence, the group switched their name to the Niger Delta Congress (NDC) and formed an alliance with the North Region’s N.P.C. The collectives’ campaign across the nation during the 1960 parliamentary

⁵⁴ Zainab Mai-Bornu, “Oil, Conflict, and the Dynamics of Resource Struggle in the Niger Delta: A Comparison of the Ogoni and Ijaw Movements,” *The Extractive Industries and Society* 3, no. 6 (October 2019): 1284–86.

election resulted in only one victory of their dozen candidates. In his reflection on his peoples' journey to an autonomous state, the General Isaac Boro of the Ijaw offered the following: "The only success of the Niger Delta Congress was that it was able to send Milford Okilo from Brass Division (Yenagoa Province) to the Federal House. ... Inevitably, therefore, the day would come for us to fight for our long-denied rights to self-determination."⁵⁵ And soon, indeed, did that day come.

On February 23rd, 1966. Isaac Boro publicly announces to a volunteer army of 150 people that today marks the official formation of the Niger Delta Republic (NDR). In the weeks leading up to this point, the Nigerian government faced its first of many military coups. The popular civilian-led government of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Tafawa Balewa was expelled by a group of Igbo militia men. Boro feared that an Igbo take-over of the government would lead to impending genocide of his people. Though fear of genocide In a speech made to his supporters, Boro reflects on the various injustices which led to this state formation: "We are going to demonstrate to the world what and how we feel about oppression... Remember your 70-year-old grandmother who still farms before she eats; remember also your poverty-stricken people; remember too, your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins; and the fight for your freedom."⁵⁶ Gowon's military government did not take lightly to this declaration. Neither did the executives at Shell-BP. Only days after the declaration, Shell's board in Nigeria offered the federal government a flotilla of pontoon boats to invade the Niger Delta. By March 4th, Boro and his troops surrendered to the federal army and were later charged on treason. Boro's sentence was commuted due to the outbreak of the war. He would, ironically, fight for the federal side as

⁵⁵ Shola Omotola, "Dissent and State Excesses in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 32, no. 2 (January 2009): 134.

⁵⁶ Isaac Boro, "Niger Delta Republic Inauguration Speech," in Zainab Mai-Bornu, "Oil, Conflict, and the Dynamics of Resource Struggle in the Niger Delta," 1290.

Gowon's administration promised to retain Niger Delta as a newly carved state from the Eastern Region. Sadly, he died in the middle of the conflict, leaving his small liberation group with no leader and little direction.⁵⁷

Fortunately, they found a new leader in a young man named Ken Saro-Wiwa. Saro-Wiwa was born under British-ruled Nigeria in 1941. He received an education and degree in English Literature at Government College in Umuahia and the University of Ibadan. Although born an Ogoni, Saro-Wiwa joined the federal forces against Biafra.⁵⁸ In 1969, he was appointed Commissioner of the River States cabinet, tending specifically to the rehabilitation of the Ogoni and other ethnic groups who served in the war. It was in this position that Saro-Wiwa published his thoughts on the Ogoni struggle in his newspaper, *The Ogoni Nationality Today and Tomorrow*, where he called for the River States to join in claiming their right to be recognized by the state.⁵⁹ Additionally, he wrote to the government and Shell to address the concerns his people felt about oil operations:

While it is a fact of history that the petroleum oil industry has given the national economy of Nigeria a great leap forward, it is equally and sadly true that neither the nation nor the Shell-BP Company has ever given serious and deserved consideration to the effects which this industry has had, and will continue to have, on the economy and life of the people of this Division... The entire economy of our people has been completely disrupted through connivance of a nation which seems to have allowed the Shell-BP, a purely commercial organization, to enter upon and seize the people's land at will... A few years ago, our streams were blessed with pure and sparkling water. But in the Gokana area of the Division, most inland waters, rivers, and water courses have today been polluted by crude oil, mud and other fluids which have contaminated our water supply.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ian Cummins and John Beasant, *Shell Shock: The Secrets and Spin of an Oil Giant* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2005), 208-10.

⁵⁸ Marion Campbell, "Witnessing Death: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Crisis." *Postcolonial Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002): 39.

⁵⁹ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day* (London: Penguin Books, 1996): 40-42.

⁶⁰ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria* (Lagos: Saros International Publishers, 1992): 45-47.

Two months later, a correspondent from the Shell corporation addressed the complaints with the following: “This petition is one of a series which have originated in Ogoni Division over the past few years attempting to place development and other responsibilities on this Company which can only be properly undertaken by Government or by a government agency... We have, however, been extremely careful to ensure that our operations cause minimum disturbance to the people in the areas in which we operate.”⁶¹ There arise two major issues with this correspondent’s claims. One, that Shell-BP operations caused minimum disturbance to the people of the Niger Delta is demonstrably false. The Greenpeace of Netherlands’ environmental survey of the Niger Delta found that no less than 3,005 oil spills were recorded in the Niger Delta between 1976 and 1986, equating to about 1,513,716 barrels of oil. These oil spills not only occurred in the Ogoni region of the Niger Delta during the time Saro-Wiwa drafted his complaints, but numerous environmental surveys point to corrosive pipes as a source of the issue.⁶² Second, during the 1970s, Shell was responsible for the exploration and production of oil while BP maintained refining and marketing operations. The respondents claims may reference to the granting of oil expedition licenses (OELs), but those licenses were granted at a federal level without consult of the people living in the Niger Delta at the time.⁶³

3.4 Conclusion

Ejeviome Ootobo once described state-governance as a concentric-circle with political governance in the outer ring, economic governance in the middle, and corporate governance at the center. Within his framework, political governance determines the type of economic a country pursuit, while economic governance provides regulatory laws for companies to conduct

⁶¹ Saro-Wiwa, *Genocide in Nigeria*, 50-51.

⁶² John Boye Ejibowah, “Who Owns the Oil? The Politics of Ethnicity in the Niger Delta of Nigeria,” *Indiana University Press* 47, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 39.

⁶³ Frynas et. al, “Maintaining Corporate Dominance after Decolonization,” 429-33.

business, and corporate governance supervises work conduct and ensures the company acts in accordance with its shareholders.⁶⁴ Whereas, in developed nations this pattern begins with the political and ends in corporate, Nigeria's development presents an inverse pattern. As the country's agricultural exports diminished and oil became the dominant export for the country, Nigerian officials sought larger percentages from oil exports and ensured that the colonial arrangements for oil prospecting remained largely in place. With the creation of the NNOC, the barrier between political, economic, and corporate dissolved as those leading the country also stood to profit the most if Shell-BP operated to their wishes.

The era between 1960 and 1980 in Nigeria is bittersweet. To some capacity, this period was a remarkable time in which ideas of prosperity through self-determination were possible. The near nationalization of oil production, in conjunction with the alliances formed with OPEC, put Nigeria at the forefront of developing nations. It was both the economic consequences of the Biafran War and dire conditions in the Middle East led the country to pivot its economy to prioritize crude oil production. Through oil, Nigeria's politicians and connected civilians amassed serious wealth and political power. These developments, while beneficial for a minority, came at a detrimental cost to those living near extraction sites. Across the Niger Delta, leaders like Isaac Boro and Ken Saro-Wiwa fought for political recognition of their cause. The damage from corroded oil pipelines and callous operations put the environment around the Niger Delta in serious risk. And though federal officials certainly benefited from the production of oil, the control of this vital resource still laid in the hands of one company and its executives. As we

⁶⁴ Samuel Ojo Oloruntoba, "State and Governance of Multinational Corporations: Shell Petroleum Company in the Niger Delta," In *Environment and Economics in Nigeria* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2011): 150-53.

will come to know in the next chapter, the war between the communities living along the Niger Delta, the federal government, and Shell-BP was only just getting started.

4 EXPOSING THE MASQUERADE

The Afrobeat pioneer and political activist Fela Kuti dedicated most of his adult-life to fighting “the struggle.” In the Nigerian context, this meant exposing political corruption in the form of overly brutal police raids and the direct targeting of political opposition. Fela’s internationally recognized discography is loaded with messages exposing state-violence. “Observation is No Crime,” from the 1977 *Zombie* record, is a striking example of Fela’s critical view of Nigerian corruption and how state used violence to suppress countering viewpoints:

Well they take the eye to see oppression
Every day (for left, for right, for up and down)
Well they take the nose to smell
Anomalities everywhere
Well they take the ear to hear corruption
Every day⁶⁵

For Fela, Nigeria is so opaquely corrupt that to maintain it, the State is required to suppress observations of corruption, if they can be seen, smelled, or heard. What makes the song particularly striking is not Fela’s critiques nor his resistance to state attempts to silence him as he explains later in the passage. Rather, it is in the title itself – if observation isn’t a crime, how did it become one?

The final chapter of this thesis delves into the tumultuous period between 1980-1995 to examine how the Ogoni, Shell-BP, and newly independent Nigerian government pursued tactics that would protect personal and inter-group interests. For the Ogoni, shifting their activism strategy from economic grievances to emphasizing the damage done to their environment, in conjunction with the exposé works done by Saro-Wiwa, would assist in defending the group from environmental destruction and ethnic suppression. To defend the government’s interests in the oil industry, as well as demonstrate federal authority, officials took violent measures against

⁶⁵ Fela Kuti, *Observation Is No Crime* (Nigeria: Coconut Records, 1976).

the Ogoni movement at all costs. This would lead to numerous charges against key Ogoni leaders by the state and the eventual deaths of several Ogoni leaders. Shell's deliberate detachment from the state's affairs would protect its assets against global protests in the aftermath of Saro-Wiwa's death. In the process of defending their community, the Ogoni ultimately exposed the nefarious practices of oil production in Ogoniland on an international scale. In the aftermath of Saro-Wiwa's death, testimony from Nigerian government officials would implicate them in promoting violence and terror in the Niger Delta. By illustrating Shell's invisible force in dictating rule and policy, Saro-Wiwa's works, and the Ogoni movement succeeded in exposing the neo-colonial dynamic between Nigeria and Shell.

4.1 Ogoni History & Mobilization

On November 25th, 1990, Ken Saro-Wiwa published an op-ed in the state-owned *Sunday Times* titled, "The Coming War in the Delta." His goal with the piece was to persuade government officials to meet with Ogoni representatives to prevent war. President General Ibrahim Babangida did not share this view of the article's purpose. He called for the essay to be removed from the *Sunday Times* arguing that its material was simply controversial and untrue. Despite the president's open advocacy for freedom of speech, Saro-Wiwa's text perhaps crossed a line in its concise and brutal take-down of the oil industry:

About three weeks ago, the smoldering war in the delta claimed its first lives. Six dead, twenty injured... I must warn the delta communities to abjure violence in the just struggle for their rights. I believe that history is on their side. But they are faced by a Company—Shell—whose management policies are racist and cruelly stupid, and which is out to exploit and encourage Nigerian ethnocentrism. And I am not sure that the Nigerian Police Force has the skills to handle the volatile situation in any but a brutal manner... Based on what is happening now, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that the confusion of policies in which Nigeria wallows is sponsored so that the peoples of the delta can be fully exploited by whoever gains access in whatever way to federal power.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Ken Saro-Wiwa, "The Coming War in the Delta," *Sunday Times*, November 25, 1990, 1.

Here, Saro-Wiwa directly connects the state and Shell to the violence and desecration happening to his community. He could not imagine that in the following decade he'd help mobilize the Ogoni people and directly impact Shell's operations in the Niger Delta. Nor could he predict that this work would lead to his untimely death just six years after.

For the next decade, Ogoni activism came in the form of various pleas and requests to the federal government. It is at this point that we should address the issue of ethnic politics in Nigeria. Though this issue plagues many of the former colonies of Africa, Nigeria is described by one British historian as “the most artificial of the many administrative units created in the course of European occupation.”⁶⁷ The Igbo, the Yoruba, and the Hausa-Fulani, as noted in the previous chapters, are not only the major ethnic groups in Nigeria – they have held exclusive power over the state since its inception. The Ogoni, making up only 0.4 percent of the Nigerian population, did not possess the manpower nor prestige to secure political protection over their land and resources. To make matters worse, most of the people living on the Delta faced some of Nigeria's worst poverty. Oil spills – which began in the 70s – had, by 1990, left little to no fertile land or fresh water for farming or fishing.⁶⁸ Historical data on employment rates, average income, education, and health is relatively sparse; however, reports from the World Bank and National Policy on Poverty Eradication in the early 2000s estimate that unemployment in Port Harcourt stayed at 30%, with some 53% of residents living in absolute poverty.⁶⁹

The term “Ogoni” encompasses some forty micro-ethnic groups who each possessed their own historical identities up until British involvement in their country. Why they settled on the

⁶⁷ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 105.

⁶⁸ Ezewuchi Fidelis Amaefule, “External Costs of Oil and Gas Exploration in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria” (Dissertation, Washington D.C., Argosy University, 2009), 44.

⁶⁹ Joshua Onyemachi, “Oil Related Environmental Degradation and Human Displacement: Case Study of Niger Delta Nigeria” (Thesis, Starkville, Mississippi State University, 2012), 60.

Niger Delta is uncertain – all we know is derived from artifacts found from around the site support this claim. From this evidence we can deduce that farming, live-stock herding, and palm oil cultivation were integral trades which fueled the Ogoni economy. To this point of reference, it is of great importance to address the significance and meaning of the natural environment and specifically water for the Ogoni. The Ogoni are comprised of six kingdoms – Babbe, Elem, Gokana, Nyo Khana, Ken-Khara and Tai – all of which claim ownership of the land dating back to the 15th century. According to oral tradition, the Ogoni migrated from ancient Ghana towards the Atlantic Coast before settling in the Niger Delta c. 15 BC. As with other traditional African societies, the land that the Ogoni have occupied for hundreds of years also relates to their distinct mythological and cosmological worldviews. Given the long historical presence and spiritual ties to their landscape, the presence of British colonial forces was met with serious opprobrium. Their community lives alongside the Niger River, and much of their livelihood relied on agriculture and fishing.⁷⁰

Ken Saro-Wiwa was born in British-ruled Nigeria in 1941. He received an education and degree in English Literature at Government College in Umuahia and the University of Ibadan. Although born an Ogoni, Saro-Wiwa joined the Nigerian government to fight against Biafran secession, which included Ogoniland.⁷¹ In 1969, he was appointed Commissioner of the River States cabinet, tending specifically to the rehabilitation of the Ogoni and other ethnic groups who served in the war. It was in this position that Saro-Wiwa published his thoughts on the Ogoni struggle in his newspaper, *The Ogoni Nationality Today and Tomorrow*, where he called for the

⁷⁰ Richard Boele, “Ogoni: Report of the UNPO Mission to Investigate the Situation of the Ogoni of Nigeria February 17 - 26, 1995,” Mission Report (The Hague: Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, May 1995), 1-4; Victor Ojaborotu, *Anatomy of the Niger Delta Crisis: Causes, Consequences, and Opportunities for Peace* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010), 97-105.

⁷¹ Marion Campbell, “Witnessing Death: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Crisis.” *Postcolonial Studies* 5, no. 1 (2002): 39.

River States to join together in claiming their right to be recognized by the state.⁷² In reflecting on his words, Saro-Wiwa commented that such a task was unsuccessful due to bickering among those fighting for supremacy among the different groups. As a writer, he found relief in writing about Ogoni struggles through works such as *On a Darkling Plain*, which was published in 1990, although most of its contents were written in 1979. His writing career would change abruptly when, as he wrote, “One night in late 1989, as I sat in my study working on a new book, I received a call to put myself, my abilities, my resources, so carefully nurtured over the years, at the feet of the Ogoni people and similar dispossessed, dispirited and disappearing peoples in Nigeria and elsewhere.”⁷³

Much of what Ogoni activists would argue under the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was rooted in the concept of *miideekor*. The root word *deekor* translates to one-day within a five-day work week. During the height of the palm trade, an informal relationship was established between the palm wine-tapper and the landowner. The wine-tapper would keep the palm wine they produced for 4 out of the 5 days. On the fifth day, the remaining production belonged to the person who owned the land from which the palm wine was extracted. An Ogoni woman named Rhoda Komdu employed this framework in one of her publications:

1. The oil resources in Ogoni belong to the Ogoni.
2. It is only right that as the property owner, Ogoni receives a fair share of the resources.
3. However, the State and Shell who are tenants on Ogoni land conspire to deny the Ogoni their due.
4. At the same time, Shell pollutes and confiscates Ogoni land without compensation, and with impunity.
5. This situation is thievery, exploitative and unjust.
6. What the Ogoni demand is a fair share or *miideekor*, not everything.⁷⁴

⁷² Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day*, 40-42.

⁷³ Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day*, 121.

⁷⁴ John Abgonifo, “Territorialising Niger Delta Conflicts: Place and Contentious Mobilisation,” *Interface: A Journal for and About Social Movements* 3, no. 1 (May 2011): 253-54.

The Ogoni argued that, based on this framework, they served as a landlord to the State and Shell-BP. What they expected in return for the use of their land would be directly articulated to the government in the Ogoni Bill of Rights.

This document titled “Ogoni Bill of Rights” was presented to the Nigerian government in October 1990. The eight-page document outlined the past injustices committed by the government and its relations with the oil industry, as well as solutions for resolving them. The first half of the listed offenses, covering 1908 to 1958, mostly centered on dissolving Ogoni authority through assimilation into broader administrative structures and redrawn territories. From 1958 onwards, the offenses strictly focused on oil: the lack of Ogoni representation in the industry, the desecration of their land, and lack of economic compensation. The bill noted the failure of federal regulation in oil production as well as the damage it had done to the community in the following articles:

15. That the search for oil has caused severe land and food shortages in Ogoni one of the most densely populated areas of Africa

16. That neglectful environmental pollution laws and substandard inspection techniques of the Federal authorities have led to the complete degradation of the Ogoni environment, turning our homeland into an ecological disaster.⁷⁵

Ghanian President Kwame Nkrumah argued that the central facet of neo-colonialism was in its inherent exploitation of the fellow African. The fact that, in the span of forty years, the Ogoni people received none of the profits from oil on their land was a clear indicator of Shell’s neo-colonial presence. Following the creation of this bill, Saro-Wiwa and his supporters created the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni Peoples (MOSOP). At this time, he had dedicated himself fully to the cause of the Ogoni people, exposing the oil companies that had destroyed his home, and the regimes that had quashed the possibilities of Ogoni autonomy.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ The Movement of the Ogoni People, Ogoni Bill of Rights, 5-6.

⁷⁶ Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day*, 55.

4.2 The Nigerian State & the Oil Bust

Between 1980 and 1990, Nigeria's economy solidified its dependency on crude oil. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation's (NNPC) "Nigeria's Crude Oil Export 1958-2007 (thousand barrels)" illustrates that the percentage of crude oil produced compared to total exports remained between 94-97%, and the growing petrodollars led Nigerian leaders into a false sense of security. On one hand, power and monetary incline placed Nigeria in leading positions in international affairs, including in the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the Organization of African Unity, the Non-aligned Movement, and OPEC.⁷⁷ On the other hand, however, citizens at home in rural areas and the Niger Delta witnessed growingly dire conditions. In his inaugural speech in 1985, General Ibrahim Babangida noted the following: "Fellow Nigerians, this country has had since independence a history mixed with turbulence and fortune. We have witnessed our rise to greatness, followed with a decline to the state of a bewildered nation. Our human potentials have been neglected, our natural resources put to waste. A phenomenon of constant insecurity and overbearing uncertainty has become characteristic of our national existence."⁷⁸

Just one decade after the oil boom of the 1970s, Nigeria suffered the brunt of a global depreciation in oil revenues. From 1980 to 1983, export income from crude oil dropped by a third. Fluctuations in pricing is inherent to a global capitalist system, but the intentional restructuring of Nigeria's economy to prioritize crude oil over all other exports meant that even minor changes in international markets had detrimental consequences. The depreciated value of oil, debt pressures from loans borrowed in the 70s and now owed, and deteriorating fiscal

⁷⁷ Ateji Mark Okorobia and Stephen Temegha Olali, "The Historical Trajectory of Crude Oil Exploration and Production in Nigeria, 1930 - 2015," in *The Political Ecology of Oil and Gas Activities in the Nigerian Aquatic Ecosystem* (London: Elsevier Science & Technology, 2017), 21–25.

⁷⁸ Tom Mbeke-Ekanem, *Beyond the Execution: Understanding the Ethnic and Military Politics in Nigeria* (New York: Page Publishing, 2018), 44.

management placed Nigeria in crisis. One year after assuming power through a coup, President Babangida launched the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) with support from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Policies contained in the SAP included the deregulation of the agricultural sector, privatization of public enterprises, devaluation of the Nigerian naira, and relaxing restraints on foreign investments. These policies enjoyed some early success in stabilizing the economy. After a few years, however, wages for urban classes and the public sector continued to fall and this, along with the dramatic reduction in spending on public infrastructure, led to massive Anti-SAP riots across Nigeria during the summer of 1989. The same year Babangida was rumored to have been placed seventh on *Ebony Magazine*'s richest men in the world⁷⁹

In January 1994, LA Times reporter Scott Kraft wrote about the diminishing middle class born from the 1970s oil boom. The lack of a middle class in Nigeria did not coincide with the state's profits the year prior, as "the country received \$2 billion in extra oil revenue during the Persian Gulf War." This begs the question, "where has all the money gone?"⁸⁰ Scholastic works on the unequal investment range in post-colonial states has seen a broad and diverse discussion, and this certainly reigned true in articles published on late-20th century Nigeria. New York Times reporter Alan Cowell wrote in 1983 that "in the catalogue of African capitals, there are many that seem to be frail places, products of colonialism's brief interlude that the traveler might visit and leave without passion or scars. Lagos is not one of them."⁸¹ The Oil Boom spurred a dramatic

⁷⁹Peter Lewis, "From Prebendalism to Predation: The Political Economy of Decline in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 34, no. 1 (March 1996): 79-82. Note: Babangida's placement on *Ebony Magazine* was a widely spread false rumor. Still, that so many students and state employees believed such speculation to the point of mass-mobilization in the streets shows serious discontent with the SAP.

⁸⁰ Scott Kraft, "Changing Lifestyles The Case of Nigeria's Vanishing Middle Class There's Plenty of Money in the Oil-Rich African Nation. But Average Citizens No Longer See Much of It," *Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 1994, 1.

⁸¹ Alan Cowell, "Lagos, Oil Boom Fading, Scarred by Vast Growth: Lagos, Oil Boom Fading, Scarred by Vast Growth," *The New York Times*, May 22, 1983, 1.

transfer in the population from rural agrarian areas to urban metropolises. A 1963 census of Lagos put the population at 430,000. By 1979, that number was closer to 5 million. Such massive growth led to grand social disorder and a place rife with traffic jams, intolerable congestion, questionable sanitation, inadequate social amenities, and rising crime rates. Money from crude oil exports went into contracts and personal business enhancements, and under Babangida's military junta, some 3,400 Nigerian officeholders possessed \$30 billion from crude oil – equal to the country's federal debt.⁸²

At the same time as the ongoing oil bust, peaceful protests and demonstrations against oil companies became popular in the Niger Delta. The pleas to the federal government in the 1970s for legal action led to, at best, minor compensation to the aggrieving parties and, at worst, complete rejection by local Shell executives. A new strategy was necessary. Between 1990 and 1993, the Ogoni and other groups living along the Niger Delta petitioned peacefully in key areas and even occupied oil installations. Shell, and other oil companies operating in the area, responded to these demonstrations by utilizing local police forces and federal soldiers to force protestors to fully vacate the premises.⁸³

In response to frequent protests, the Babangida regime increased the financial distribution going towards oil producing areas from 1.5% to 3%. The Oil Mineral Producing Areas of Development Commission (OMPADEC) was established in 1992 to ensure the correct amounts went to the correct parties. As expected, they did not. For one, there was no supervising authority over this commission. Chairman Albert K. Horsfall only needed to report the commissions conduct to the head of state. Without performance guidelines or governable controls, the

⁸² Scott Kraft, "Changing Lifestyles," 2; Peter Lewis, "From Prebendalism to Predation," 84-85.

⁸³ J.M. Ayuba, "The Democratisation of Violence in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, 1999-2007," in *Anatomy of the Niger Delta Crisis*, vol. 3, African Politics (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2010), 132.

commissioners on OMPADEC could and did undertake a variety of capital-generating projects -- from setting up banks to manufacturing firms to securing substantial public contracts through their connections. Under immense public pressure, the government ran an investigation against OMPADEC and fired Horsfall among others. Second, and most important, the 1.5% increase in revenue would not have met the demands of river community leaders even if OMPADEC had distributed the money correctly. During the Nigerian constitutional conference of 1994-95, communities from the Niger Delta spoke to members of the state to inquire how their communities might become joint owners of the oil alongside the federal government. Their proposed percentage was 13% of all revenues. The motion did not pass, though the 13% allocation clause would eventually come into effect in 1999.⁸⁴

Perhaps Babangida's most notorious act while president was during the Persian Gulf war. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait under Saddam Husein drove the price of oil exponentially higher, with a barrel of oil going up from \$16 in the summer of 1990 to \$26 by mid-November. Shell's third-quarter report from that year found a "new profit of \$1.5 billion, nearly a threefold increase from earning in the same period last year."⁸⁵ As the fourth largest producer of oil at this time, the SPDC and federal government stumbled upon a windfall of cash. The Babangida regime could have used these funds to repay the national debt or built much needed infrastructure. Instead, the public discovered that an excess of \$12.2 billion dollars, accrued from September 1988 to July 1994, "was liquidated in less than six years.... Spent on what could neither be adjudged genuine high priority nor truly regenerative investment; neither the president nor the Central Bank

⁸⁴ Jędrzej Georg Frynas, *Oil in Nigeria: Conflict and Litigation between Oil Companies and Village Communities*, vol. 1, Politics and Economics in Africa (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 2000), 50-53; Eghosa Osaghae, "The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian State," *African Affairs* 94 (1995): 337.

⁸⁵ N.A., "2 Major Oil Firms Post High Profits: Gulf Crisis: Britain's Automobile Assn. calls on one firm to explain a threefold increase," *L.A. Times*, November 8, 1990, 1.

Governor accounted to anyone for these massive extra-budgetary expenditures... these disbursements were clandestinely undertaken while the country was openly reeling with a crushing external debt overhang.”⁸⁶ Under Babangida’s rule, Nigerians found themselves increasingly controlled abroad by foreign dignitaries in the form of the IMF and at home by corrupt leadership. Authors Ike Okonta and Orunto Douglas claim that Babangida’s lasting legacy “was the democratization of corruption and the corruption of democracy.”⁸⁷ Babaginda had used his political power to amass abundant personal wealth with little regard for the people of Nigeria. Placing the country in such debt led to increasing protests and calls for Babangida to hold an election. In 1993, that election was held, and M.K.O. Abiola won. Babangida did not accept the results and instead instituted an interim government led by Ernest Shonekan, who was swiftly overthrown by General Sani Abacha in November 1993. Under Abacha’s rule, tension between river communities, oil executives, and the state increased.

⁸⁶ Kayode Fayemi, *The Oil Weapon: Sanctions and the Nigerian Military Regime. A Report on the Need for Full and Comprehensive Sanctions*, London, December 1995, 6.

⁸⁷ Ike Okonta and Orunto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 37.

4.3 Trials & Tribulations



Figure 5: Ogoni Day Demonstration in Nigeria, May 1 1993. Courtesy of Greenpeace Media.

October 30 1990: a protest takes place at Shell's facility in Umuechem, east of Port Harcourt. The non-violent protestors are primarily from within the community at this demonstration. They bear leaves and sing songs of the agonies the company has caused their health and environment. They demand the immediate halt of all operations at this facility. Just a day prior, the divisional manager of the Shell-Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) of Nigeria requests support for the paramilitary Mobile Police in anticipation of an "impending

attack” on this facility. The next day, Mobile Police respond by teargassing these peaceful protestors in front of Shell’s facility. The Umuechem Protestors flee the scene immediately as shots are fired blindly in their direction. Away from the facility, the Mobile Police are not satisfied with that most protestors ran away. The next day they bring weapons to their homes. On November 1st 1990, an estimated eighty people are found dead with bullet wounds. Over five hundred homes are burnt to the ground.⁸⁸ The Umuechem Massacre, as it would later be known, is an overtly aggressive attempt of genocide exercised by local governance through Shell’s directive. The Massacre is an extreme, but pertinent example of the use of state violence to protect oil revenues. Revealing Shell-BP’s direct involvement in summoning military force would become a pivotal element for the author activist Saro-Wiwa.

From 1990-1992, MOSOP began a campaign to promote their objectives domestically. A copy of the *Ogoni Bill of Rights* was first sent to Babangida’s Armed Forces Ruling Council before being published as an advertisement across a series of Nigerian newspapers. MOSOP established a public education campaign to explain the bill of rights to other Ogoni people. By September 1991, Saro-Wiwa’s views changed. He didn’t believe the issues regarding economic restructuring and environmental rehabilitation could be accomplished within the government when Nigeria’s military leaders prioritized oil revenues for themselves. MOSOP began reaching out to international NGOs in 1992 like Human Rights Watch to intervene, though they found little success. In his work on Ogoni activism, Bob Clifford argues that much of MOSOP’s success relied on changing the international narrative from an ethnic conflict to an environmental

⁸⁸ Daniel Omoweh, *Shell Petroleum Development Company, the State and Underdevelopment of Nigeria’s Niger Delta: A Study in Environmental Degradation* (Asmara: Africa World Press, 2005), 135; Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 97-98; Human Rights Watch, “The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria’s Oil Producing Communities” (Washington D.C., London, and Brussels: Human Rights Watch, January 1999), 112.

one. Instead of emphasizing the need for self-determination, which certainly continued to underpin much of MOSOP's work, MOSOP activists brought attention to the environmental harm caused by gas flares and oil spills in the region. Most significantly, they highlighted Shell's weapons shipments to Nigeria, its employment of private sector security, and records where executives called Nigerian military forces to quell protests. This new strategy placed Shell at the heart of the conflict.⁸⁹

In response to all this, the Nigerian government passed the Treason and Treasonable Felony Decree of 1993, which declared that any public statement calling for ethnic autonomy, revised boundaries, or plans of secession would be punishable by death. That such a decree was published days before Shell released a public Briefing Note stating the following is no coincidence:

The reasons for Mr. Saro-Wiwa's attacks on SPDC are clear. He is attempting to use SPDC in his effort to raise the international profile of his concerns for the Ogoni people and to meet his objective of their political self-determination... Despite this, SPDC does sympathize with community concerns and continues to try in every possible way to help promote harmony between communities, local and Federal government and the oil companies working these areas. However, Shell believes that these are Nigerian problems. They should be resolved in Nigeria by agreement between Nigerian people.⁹⁰

This Briefing from November 1993 features a central tenet of Shell's neo-colonial strategy. Here, the SPDC tries to deflect criticism about its corporate conduct in the Delta by framing MOSOP's grievances as a concern of politics rather than economics. This strategy is one that appears in much of Shell's defense work in various courts in the later 1990s. But that is a topic for future discussion.

⁸⁹ Interviewee 23 (MOSOP-USA leader), personal discussion with author, St. Louis, MO, March 14, 1998 in Clifford Bob, "From Ethnic to Environmental Conflict: Nigeria's Ogoni Movement," in *The Marketing of Rebellion: Insurgents, Media, and International Activism*, Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 83-85.

⁹⁰ Ken Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day*, 113.

Ideas regarding Ogoni self-determination threatened the already-questioned rule of General Sani Abacha, whose regime took over in 1993 despite holding no claim to political or ethical legitimacy. Scholars like Marion Campbell and Sanya Osha have been more than open in discussing the “Sani Abacha’s illegal and lethally corrupt military government.”⁹¹ One certainly cannot ignore the vile record of state violence against citizens and the Ogoni. Abacha’s intentions after rising to power were quite clear – to demonstrate authority and to capitalize on the position as much as possible. Abacha began terrorizing MOSOP by attacking local Ogoni communities around Ogoniland. One military attack on the Okrika community resulted in the deaths of 95 Ogoni and the destruction of hundreds of houses. On May 21, 1994, four moderate Ogoni leaders were murdered by a group of youths who were suspected to be connected to the Abacha regime.⁹² The very next day Ken Saro-Wiwa was arrested for the murder of these four men. The charges, however, were fraudulent and only served to cover the actual perpetrators of the incident – the police. After residing in a detention center outside Port Harcourt for a year and a half, on November 10, 1995, Saro-Wiwa and eight of his compatriots were killed by the state by hanging.

In the immediate aftermath of his hanging, the international community responded strongly against this heinous murder. Much of the blame for it was placed on Shell, which was so inundated with criticism that they both withdrew from Ogoniland and released a public statement on Ken Saro-Wiwa:

The 1995 executions of Ogoni leader Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogonis by Nigeria’s military government attracted international condemnation. Although SPDC was not responsible for those tragic events, and SPDC - and Shell International in London – had attempted to persuade the government to grant clemency, the family of Ken Saro-Wiwa

⁹¹ Marion Campbell, “Witnessing Death,” 43.

⁹² Sanya Osha, *Ken Saro-Wiwa’s Shadow*, 90.

and others brought a court case against Shell. The allegations being made are false and without merit.⁹³

Did Shell truly play no role in the murder of these protestors? Or terrorizing the Ogoni? After years of denial, in December 1996 Shell did admit to inviting “the Nigerian authorities to help put down the ‘disturbance’ in its Ogoni concession area.”⁹⁴ While the company has not admitted to coordinating the execution of Saro-Wiwa, it should be noted that the Ogoni were actively protesting and preventing the construction of more drill sites in their land. The obstruction of the land, in conjunction with Abacha’s demonstrations that made workers abandon drill sites that were in proximity to the attacks, certainly hampered potential profits and could have proved quite irksome. Shell’s motives and its connections to the Nigerian government can be summarized by a statement from Saro-Wiwa: “Shell is always there in the background even if it denies all participation”⁹⁵

⁹³ Shell Nigeria. “Ken Saro-Wiwa.” Shell, n.d., 1.

⁹⁴ Ike Okonta and Orono Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 135.

⁹⁵ Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day*, 58

4.4 International Fallout



Figure 6: Friends of the Earth Czech Republic protests after death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, 1996. Courtesy of the University of Southern California.

At the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, community leaders, chiefs, and kings of the Niger Delta came together to publish a statement to submit to the World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Environment and Development. Their statements reads as follows:

Apart from air pollution from the oil industry's emissions and flares day and night, producing poisonous gases that are silently and systematically wiping out vulnerable airborne biota and otherwise endangering the life of plants, game, and man himself, we have widespread water pollution and soil and land pollution that respectively result in the death of most aquatic eggs and juvenile stages of life of finfish and shellfish and sensible animals (like oysters) on the one hand, whilst, on the other hand, agricultural lands contaminated with oil spills become dangerous for farming, even where they continue to produce any significant yields.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Birinengi Idoniboye-Obu, "Resource Exploitation and Impact of Industrial Activities." In *The Endangered Environment of the Niger Delta: Constraints and Strategies* (Rio de Janeiro: World Conference of Indigenous Peoples on Environment and Development, 1992), 59.

The final section of this chapter seeks to highlight the damages done to the Ogoni community, its ecology, and how such destruction could be permitted. Whereas previous sections traced the methods and tactics used by the various groups of this story, the final section looks to environmental surveys and Ogoni testimony to explore the extent of environmental damage. In his work titled *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, Rob Nixon defines slow violence as “a violence which occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.”⁹⁷ Using this methodological tool, the following section uses two environmental surveys conducted at the time, in addition to testimony from indigenous leaders and activists. Following their stories, along with the scientific examination of the air, water, and wildlife, this final section demonstrates how neo-colonialism, in its inherent separation from the state, permitted such ecological violence to occur for several decades.

The World Bank published its environmental survey of the Niger Delta region in 1995, which examined the most pressing environmental issues facing the region and offered strategies to combat such threats. The report’s section on oil runoff analyzed a new plant near Shell’s headquarters in Port Harcourt. The surveyors noted that “from a trip to Korika River it could be seen that the treatment facilities at the new Port Harcourt refinery are not satisfactory. Lumps from oil spillage can be directly observed and oil films cover the water surface.” Elevated levels of hydrocarbons were found all over nearby refineries in the region, indicating that “little or no wastewater treatment is performed.”⁹⁸ Later in the report, the World Bank offers a section on regulatory and institutional response to degradation. This section studies the government’s laws

⁹⁷ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 2.

⁹⁸ “Defining an Environmental Development Strategy for the Niger Delta.” Environmental Assessment. Niger Delta: Industry and Energy Operations Division West Central Africa Department, May 25, 1995, 35.

on pollutants and how it protects its citizens from environmental waste. Under every subsection, from energy and minerals to forestry and wildlife to industrial pollution, environmental impact assessments, urban development, health and sanitation, and flooding and erosion, the major constant was found to be lack of enforcement.⁹⁹ The government's inability to enforce what the survey deemed to be comprehensible laws is indicative of its motivations during the period to have kept oil running at status quo.

Although the previous survey was conducted in 1995, the Nigerian government had known of the environmental destruction since its own survey was conducted in 1983. Their research centered specifically on the effects of oil industries in the Niger Delta, as opposed to the World Bank's comprehensive overview of the environment. An excerpt from one of the members of the Inspectorate Division of the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (IDNNPC) found "the slow poisoning of the waters of this country and the destruction of vegetation and agricultural land by oil spills which occur during petroleum operations." Rather than shifting blame to the government's ignorance or the possibility of local communities destroying these pipelines, the IDNNPC emphasized the role of the oil industry in such destruction: "But since the inception of the oil industry in Nigeria more than twenty-five years ago, there has been no concerned and effective effort on the part of the government, let alone oil operators, to control the environmental problems associated with the industry."¹⁰⁰ That such incendiary testimony could be offered to a branch of the Nigerian government punctuates the horrors these surveyors witnessed.

⁹⁹ "Defining an Environmental Development Strategy," 46-52.

¹⁰⁰ Ian Cummins and John Beasant, *Shell Shock: The Secrets and Spin of an Oil Giant*, First Edition (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2005), 11.

Shell's former head of environmental studies, J. P. Van Dessel, visited the region to analyze the status of Shell's operations. After visiting the plants and pipelines, Van Dessel wrote that "wherever I went, I could see that Shell's installations were not working cleanly. They didn't satisfy their own standards, and they didn't satisfy international standards. Every terrain I saw was polluted, every terminal I saw was contaminated."¹⁰¹ He found pipelines that were, by the 1990s, completely rusted and obsolete. Despite Shell's own claims that it replaced swampy pipelines every ten to fifteen years, Van Dessel during his survey that there was still a backlog of older pipelines that were leaking rapidly and in need of replacement. What Van Dessel found in his trip across the Niger Delta was a slow violence to the environment committed by the company for which he worked. He was so distraught by what he found that after only two years on the job, he resigned from the company in December 1994 and now works closely with the Environmental and Social Impact Assessment.¹⁰² How could such atrocities be permitted in the Niger Delta? And, after this unmasking, how has the company employed careful tactics to justify its prior practices?

Part of Shell's strategy, in response to claims against its management of pipelines was to blame local rebellious forces for destroying them. They argued that these groups were destroying the pipelines in the hopes of receiving some compensation from the company. The company offered little evidence to support these conclusions, as seen in the July 1996 British Advertising Standards Authority ruling:

Shell Provided information from their Nigerian company (SPDC) that they believed showed that 17 of the 24 spills since SPDC staff were withdrawn from the Ogoni area in 1993 were caused by sabotage. The Authority noted the information described incidents that could have been sabotage but did not substantiate this. The Authority considered the

¹⁰¹ Ian Cummins and John Beasant, *Shell Shocked*, 38.

¹⁰² Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 66-72; Ineke Steinhauer, "8020. EIA SEA Capacity Development." Environmental Impact Assessment, April 2019, 1.

Advertisers had not given enough information to support the claim and asked for it not to be repeated.¹⁰³ (ava monthly, no. 62 July 1996).

Even today, a visit to Shell Nigeria's website finds a display on oil spill data that illustrates, quite vividly, that from 2013-2019 their in-company surveys indicate that 90% of spills in Nigeria were caused by sabotage.¹⁰⁴ These numbers should be considered with some skepticism, considering that those surveying are either representatives from Shell or the Nigerian government – both of whom benefit greatly from oil production. The power of neo-colonialism lies in its ability to masquerade immoral practices in the name of profit. In documenting the story of the Ogoni, this final section has portrayed the level of damage done to the environment from a range of 3rd party source materials. Shell's shifting of blame on local actors seems dubious, and the fact that the only proof of sabotage comes from the company and the government should give pause.

4.5 Conclusion

President Lawrence Summers of the World Bank in 1991 once promoted policy that would export toxic waste from industrialized countries into Africa. His reasoning, according to a confidential memo recently published, was primarily based in “the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that... I've always thought that countries in Africa are vastly under polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles.”¹⁰⁵ Summers, at this time, was surely unaware of the pollution occurring along the Niger Delta. While actively waging war against Africa would be seen as active aggression, the shifting of harmful waste – even if lethal – did not

¹⁰³ *Advertising Standards Authority Monthly*, No. 62, July 1996, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Shell Nigeria. “Oil Spill Data,” Shell, 2020, 1.

¹⁰⁵ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 1.

carry similar stigma. Nixon's *Slow Violence* uses this evidence to conclude that environmental marginalization is but a byproduct of neoliberalism.¹⁰⁶

It could be argued that the veiling of environmentally harmful practices in Africa should also be considered as neo-colonial. The fact that a multi-national corporation like Shell could continue drilling for oil from 1960-1995, while despoiling the local environment without any repercussion, is disappointing and yet unsurprising. While Shell is no longer actively drilling in Ogoniland, the pipes burrowed into the land continue to leak oil. The network Aljazeera recently published a short documentary to show the continued suffering by Ogoni survivors who are unable to relocate. "Nothing much comes out of the water these days... the film of oil makes it almost impossible for marinelife to survive", says reporter Idris Ahmed—panning the camera to show the swamp-like landscape.¹⁰⁷ The oil has permeated every living thing – from the fish to the water, to the soil that the Ogoni walk on every day. Most of the Ogoni community is stuck in this devastated landscape, as much of their agricultural trade has suffered and land is scarce. Later on, Ahmed interviews an environmental activist by the name of Celestine Akpobari who says, "There were legitimate demands of the Ogoni struggle, as enshrined in the Ogoni Bill of Rights, and we are yet to achieve any of them. Our system, I grant there should be no oil assumption or oppression in Ogoniland until some of these issues are settled."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 2-14.

¹⁰⁷ Ahmed Idris, *Nigeria's Ogoniland: Desperate for Clean Water*, Ogoniland: Al Jazeera, 2018, 0:16-0:22.

¹⁰⁸ Ahmed Idris, *Nigeria's Ogoniland*, 1:56-2:15.

5 CONCLUSION



Figure 7: Oil pollution in the Niger Delta (Photo: George Osodi). Courtesy of the Goldman Environmental Prize.

President Lawrence Summers of the World Bank in 1991 once promoted policy that would export toxic waste from industrialized countries into Africa. His reasoning, according to a confidential memo recently published, was primarily based in “the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that... I’ve always thought that countries in Africa are vastly under polluted; their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles.”¹⁰⁹ Summers, at this time, was surely unaware of the pollution occurring along the Niger Delta. While actively waging war against Africa would be seen as active aggression, the shifting of harmful waste – even if lethal – did not carry similar stigma. Nixon’s *Slow Violence* uses this evidence to conclude that environmental marginalization is but a byproduct of neoliberalism.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*, 1.

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How can the Ogoni achieve their goals as outlined in their bill of rights? The legacy of neo-colonialism in the region is one that continues to be faced by other sovereign nations across the continent. Seeking legal judgment against Shell in Nigeria may be difficult, as environmentalist Godwin Uyi Oju argues that “every government in Nigeria has been in business with Shell, and Shell acts as the unofficial senior partner... Shell is dictating the pace of legislation and influencing its enforcement to its own advantage.”¹¹³ In 2019, a class action

¹¹¹ Ahmed Idris, *Nigeria's Ogoniland: Desperate for Clean Water*, Ogoniland: Al Jazeera, 2018, 0:16-0:22.

¹¹² Ahmed Idris, *Nigeria's Ogoniland*, 1:56-2:15.

¹¹³ Ike Okonta and Oronto Douglas, *Where Vultures Feast*, 228.

lawsuit against Shell and Nigeria was filed by the widows of the four Ogoni leaders who were murdered. Esther Kiobel, Victoria Bera, Blessing Eawo, and Charity Levula sued SPDC claiming representatives from the company bribed key witnesses that led to the state-sanctioned deaths of their husbands. The court heard testimony from several witnesses who said they were paid by Shell affiliates to rehearse false testimony in the trial that led to their execution. The Dutch judges, upon their verdict, argued there was insufficient evidence and neither Shell or the SPDC could be held liable for witness tampering in that 1995 trial.¹¹⁴

In spite of what may seem to be defeat, Shell-BP has faced serious repercussions in a variety of courts for misconduct in the Niger Delta. In 2021, the very same Dutch court ordered Shell to compensate Nigerian farmers some one hundred million dollars for oil spills that contaminated swathes of farmland and fishing waters along the Delta. The case began in 2008, when a lawyer named Chima Williams learned of the oil spills in Goi and Oruma and began talking to residents to gauge options for remediation. Previous attempts to hold multinational corporations accountable in Nigeria failed, largely due to subsidiary insulation. Shell couldn't be blamed for the SPDC's conduct because the SPDC was the perceived sole perpetrator for misconduct, not Shell. After an unfavorable ruling in 2013, followed by an appeal in 2014, the court ruled that "Royal Dutch Shell ultimately has oversight and control over SPDC's operations to the point that it has a duty to prevent oil spills."¹¹⁵ Chima Williams won the Goldman Environmental Prize in 2022 for his groundbreaking work.

This thesis has attempted to shed light on the Ogoni and the environmental havoc caused by the oil industry. In tracing the past century, I have explored the main actors and their desires

¹¹⁴ Andy Roswell, "Ogoni 9: 24 Years after Their Execution, Court Told by Key Witness: 'Yes Shell Bribed Me,'" *Oil Change International*, October 11, 2019, 1; Anna Holligan, "Ogoni nine: Nigerian widows lose case against oil giant Shell," *BBC News*, March 23, 2022, 1.

¹¹⁵

and defense mechanisms, while emphasizing the amount of environmental damage done. Much scholarly work has been published on this issue; however, historians have tended to focus on the physical violence of the conflict. I believe that more attention should be given to the slow violence occurring in front of our eyes. Ken Saro-Wiwa helped to initiate a grassroots resistance movement against forces far larger and more powerful than the Ogoni. Despite the lack of results today, these efforts should not be ignored. Neo-colonialism is more nefarious than foreign economic dominance. As opposed to the outright aggression of economic conquest, it insinuates itself by degrees into every facet of the country upon which it preys. The legacy of MOSOP and Ken Saro-Wiwa relate to a more expansive narrative on environmental movements across the globe. Activists in the Global South like Ridhima Pandley in India, Kaluki Paul Mutuku in Kenya, Nina Gualinga in Ecuador, Leah Namugerwa in Uganda, and Wangari Maathai in Nigeria have protested their local governments over environmental destruction caused by development.¹¹⁶ As local activists around the globe continue to form grassroots movements in response to environmental degradation, there is still much work to be done. As Saro-Wiwa said in his final words, “Lord take my soul, but the struggle continues.”¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Chika Unigwe, “It’s Not Just Greta Thunberg: Why Are We Ignoring the Developing World’s Inspiring Activists?” *The Guardian*, October 2019, 1.

¹¹⁷ Saro-Wiwa, *A Month and a Day*, 175.

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